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RACE

Books by William McFee

ALIENS
AN OCEAN TRAMP
CAPTAIN MACEDOINE'S DAUGHTER
CASUALS OF THE SEA
COMMAND
HARBOURS OF MEMORY
PORT SAID MISCELLANY
RACE

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BY

WILLIAM McFEE

A mingling of blood, a fermenting of sweet thoughts into strong desires, and the beginning of new races

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First Edition

TO
"DON CARLOS"

PART I

Yet even here the honeysuckle blows,
And the shy nightingale enchants the gloom;
And sometimes I have seen the wild white rose
Around the hawthorne bough at Barnet Fair;
And when the evening flowers with lights of home,
Each window seems a little silent prayer.

—Thomas Burke

RACE

CHAPTER I

PITY is often given where it is least needed. The Heaths had comparatively few neighbours, and they all united in being sorry for Mrs. Heath. It began with Mrs. Mills next door, whose widowhood had by grace become a blessing. It assumed a slightly ridiculous aspect in the next cottage where Miss Culvert tarried while on earth, and it became jocular and unconventional with Mrs. Giffel, another widow, who announced in her hoarse booming contralto her thanks to the Lord He hadn't given *her* a quiverful like that. Cicely was enough for any lone woman. Persons having dealings with Cicely, as teachers, for instance, hostesses of children's parties, or those hardy folk who superintend school treats and picnics, agreed with Mrs. Giffel, whose long horse face, with its lank black hair falling around it, became benevolently saturnine as she explained that Cicely's father was the seventh son of a seventh son, and she couldn't possibly be at ease in Zion!

There were five cottages in the terrace on the open

fields behind the waterworks; the Heaths occupied Number Two, and the sexton of St. Peter's, Mr. Matthew Kitching, an elderly, sharp-eyed hayseed of a man with the bushy red chin beard of the professional gardener, lived with his wife and two little girls in Number One. Their pity was less openly expressed because the Kitchings were of the getting-on kind of people. Mr. Kitching himself habitually wore the embittered expression of the respectable artisan slowly urging himself out of wage slavery into the estate of the small tradesman. Gardeners had no trade union in those days, and if they had, you would never have found Matthew Kitching having any truck with them. Nothing was said, of course, but it was a safe enough wager that the Kitchings would never be nine in family either. Mr. Kitching, when he was cutting grass with his scythe, his lean arms bare to the shoulder, was decidedly symbolical. Mrs. Giffel, independent of him because she was a Wesleyan and had no garden, once boomed it into Miss Culvert's scandalized ears as they saw him on the lawn at the Lodge.

"There is a reaper whose name is Death," quoted that vivacious lady, and somehow the witticism became known among the more sophisticated folk who lived in West Barnet.

All the good people might reasonably marvel at the physical difficulties of inserting so large a family as the Heaths in one small undetached cottage. Down in "The Avenue," of course, that vigorous East London

slum transplanted to the country and apparently thriving the better for it, whole families lived in one room, and on Saturday nights fought notable battles, the breadwinner being removed by the police, who worked four-in-hand, early Sunday morning. But between such people and Mr. Heath's family there was no comparison at all. Mr. Heath was respectable. Mr. Heath was almost in the professional class. He was one of the oldest inhabitants of South Barnet. When he came from the West of England with his wife and twin babies, Kate and Fanny, to be headmaster at the new parish school down the High Road, even St. Peter's Church was only a temporary iron-roofed shack and West Barnet was yet a neglected fragment of the huge area of Edmonton. In those days they lived in a real cottage all covered with creeper that turned to ruddy gold in autumn, and was alive with spiders, right on the High Road and only a step from the school. It was also immediately opposite the Rose and Crown, whose rapid development from a quiet coaching tavern to a rendezvous for the most desperate characters in the Palmer's Road section led the authorities to pull down the schoolmaster's cottage and build a modern police station on that corner. This, however, was several years later. The Heaths lived in their cottage, and the twins, Kate and Fanny, not very easy to tell apart, took the air in a large wooden perambulator, like a Bath chair with what would be called nowadays a one-man-top. It

had three wheels, as had the complicated tricycle which their father propelled on the High Road and up the long, tiresome slope to East Barnet. If Mr. Heath had not been so enthusiastic in his pursuit of mechanical amusement, he might have tricycled himself and his numerous family safely out of this story. It might have so happened that Hazel, who was born a few weeks after his accident, would otherwise have been a normal child without that terrifying talent for "taking people off" and "seeing right through you." Perhaps Lena and Dora and the two younger ones, who at the time of this story were scarcely equipped with negotiable personalities, would never have come into the world at all, let alone into the tale. There are some men who, when thwarted in their spiritual enterprises, retaliate upon the world with a sort of ruthless fecundity. They do the thing that lies nearest. Perhaps they are justified when their offspring develop the way Hazel did. Hazel never married. She became one of the Queens of Romance. Hazel Heath. Hazel M. Heath? The very same.

But Mr. Heath was not satisfied with a slow contraption where he had to sit in a little chair between two big wheels while with his right hand he twiddled hurriedly the rods that deflected a small rudder wheel behind. Every day adventurers went past him like the wind, mounted on enormous six-foot affairs. No one who only met Mr. Heath when he lived up the hill in Haythorne Terrace could imagine

him as he was before his accident. He was then very decided and professorial, of course, as he was up to the very moment of the air raid fifty years later. But he had, in spite of the beard which was already thick and dark, and in spite of the frigid air he cultivated on account of his position as a pedagogue, a good deal of the boy. Kate, his wife, was not the only one to think of him like that. He gave everyone the impression of a hound in leash, straining to get off, in great strides, into the future, where were riches and fame and the victor's crown.

One thing worth noting of him was that he never afterward referred to the cause of his misfortune. For all one could know, he was unaware of it and dated his conscious being from the time he came out of the hospital in London. Kate did not speak of it either, but she gave the impression of having it always in mind.

She was walking slowly up the High Road in the dusk of a summer evening, the twins in their cot for the night, and Mr. Heath, on his new high bicycle, somewhere in front. She could not see him, but the lamp of the machine, which hung on the wide hub of the wheel between the spokes (considered a very tasteful design), threw an eerie flicker ahead. He was up beyond the waterworks, and the road dipped and curved slightly before it shot down the valley where a brook wandered after crawling through a sewer under the railway embankment. Kate walked on, singing softly to herself, for she was very happy,

in spite of her approaching confinement. She passed the waterworks, whence came a rhythmic clank and rumble as the pistons slid softly to and fro. She saw the hasting shadows of the flywheel spokes on the lighted window and the engineer silhouetted at the door smoking his pipe. An express appeared on the distant embankment, the open fire door on the locomotive throwing red rays upon the smoke and steam from the stack as the train fled away to Scotland. She could feel a tremor of the ground beneath her feet for some moments after the sound had died away. And then her thoughts swung back swiftly to her husband. She could see the road all the way across the valley, yet no light. He could not have got over the crown of the hill yet. She put her hand to her breast. She hastened a little, calling him by name. And it was near the bottom she found him, where a brick, used by some drayman to rest his team while he tightened a girth, had twisted that high wheel from the rider's hand and flung him upon the ground.

There are many kinds of shock; or the same shock has many varying effects upon different organisms. Upon Alfred Heath, apart from the crude smashing of the nervous system so that for months he could not read two consecutive lines of print without becoming giddy, could not lace up his shoes without fainting away—apart from this, he changed. The expression of the eyes altered. It might not be too much to assert that, when he fell off that high bicycle

Alfred Heath really did die, and some wandering and forlorn wraith, lately disembodied, slipped in as he slipped out; and this would account for the change. He grew to have a tight-lipped look, and became preoccupied with exasperatingly general subjects, taking for granted that his own condition was no theme for conversation, and must be accepted like the seasons and the change of government, as though he feared interrogation would discover the trick he had played. One thing was certain: he had a special blank look whenever his eye fell on Hazel's thin ironical features. And Hazel, who was always somewhat coltish, would look more than ever like a runaway horse and gallop out of sight. Later, of course, this proclivity was mental. She would bolt intellectually and murmur crushingly, "You see, Father dear?" and return to her book.

All this might mean anything or nothing. Kate Heath, his wife, could not be expected to weigh psychic problems in a nice balance. Kate did not think much at all. She felt. And to her very great horror, since she was a sincere Christian, she felt as if she had lost the man she had married. This was the shock as she felt it, nursing the fretful Hazel and the apathetic figure who sat for long hours drumming with his fingers on the window. There was a great deal of work for her in those days, work connected with getting out of their creeper-covered cottage and living for a while over Mrs. Salisbury's drapery shop in the High Road, until by

good fortune old Mr. Haythorne, who owned Haythorne's Woods and all the land for several miles east and west but not south, heard of her misfortune (no doubt through the vicar of St. Peter's) and told the vicar the Heaths could have one of the cottages he was putting up, as an experiment, behind the waterworks, for four shillings a week. Much work of that kind, which she had to manage singlehanded with a baby in arms and the twins scarcely able to walk yet. This was all for the good, since she was not allowed time to brood; but the change in her was all the deeper. Alfred was a churchman and, when he began to go out again, resumed attendance at St. Peter's. Kate, when she had time, took the baby and ran down to the chapel. It was more a matter of atmosphere than doctrine with Kate. As the gray stone pile of the new St. Peter's rose tier on tier, and the vicarage rose beside it, Kate's affection for the small iron-roofed chapel rose also. The vicar's ten-minute sermon, read from sheets of paper candidly laid upon the remote and lofty pulpit, the vicar himself in his vestments, the surpliced choirboys whose high clear voices soared over the rumble of the organ like a flock of bright birds in a stormy sky, held no consolation for a woman struggling with her perplexing problems. At the chapel the sermon was the thing. A hymn, a prayer, another hymn and another prayer, a brief reading from the Bible, a hymn, and then the preacher announced his text. Kate liked it. She liked the people—small

storekeepers and clerks and their wives, their heads never very far above the seas of life, swimming courageously and inexpertly, and sometimes, when the head of the house died or was "laid aside," as they called it, almost going down altogether. And as the years went by, some grew prosperous, the congregation increased, the chapel was licensed for marriages and they were reinforced by some of the more substantial folk who came to live in West Barnet. It was a healthy place with southern exposure and gravel soil, low rates, and good schools. Indeed, schools abounded. They sprang up everywhere, flourished, and died. Boys' schools and girls' schools, academies and colleges, they ran up bills at the local shops, added a touch of colour to the church services for a while, and expired. They were all too dear for Kate. The twins went to the parish school down the road, where her husband ought to have been in charge, and she taught little Hazel herself. Somehow she got through the years.

And so did her husband. The doctor's orders were very explicit. He must do nothing. Perhaps in time, a long time ahead, he might be able to take up some light employment, "something of a secretarial nature," Mr. Heath himself described it. But that time never came. "Out of the question," was Mr. Heath's own verdict. He could sleep, he could read, he could stroll gently along the country lane toward Friern Barnet and sit for a while on the seat by the Orange Tree Tavern. He could converse with the vicar, for

he was a regular attendant at Sunday morning service, and even smoke a very mild cigar. A diet of milk and eggs, whereby Mrs. Heath became noted for the latter and Mrs. Giffel made good-humoured comments concerning "the cock's shrill clarion" and St. Peter's, was all Mr. Heath required. And absolute quiet. This given, he throve. He rose late and breakfasted in his room, which faced the east, and looked over the *Globe*, an evening paper of the day before which the vicar sent in by Mr. Kitching. It would not be easy to explain just what was in his mind all day as he went for his gentle stroll and took his midday repast and his brief afternoon sleep. Downstairs his wife was busy, getting the children away to school, feeding the fowls, selling packets of tea which she filled from a large chest in the kitchen, doing clear-starching for the big house of Haythorne and dressmaking for the shopkeepers' wives. This, with her own tiny patrimony, the still tinier pension her husband received, and the vicar's occasional beneficence, kept them going. Mr. Heath was never bothered with budgets. As time went on he grew to accept himself in the rôle of invalid. What it cost him no one knew, for he gave no sign. When he descended to take his place at the head of the table for the evening meal, he dismissed the thoughts of what might have been had he remained the man he was before his accident, and assumed a cheerful and patriarchal manner. It was his custom to allude to the growing family of girls

as "olive branches," which made Mrs. Giffel laugh, for some obscure reason. She never divulged the secret humour of this remark, unless we recall Miss Culvert's protest over the back-garden fence.

"But I don't see anything at all *funny* about it, Mrs. Giffel," said the virgin severely.

"Don't you? Ho-ho! Why," said Mrs. Giffel in her booming contralto, her mouth drawn down at the corners, her somewhat yellowish teeth showing, "he might have called 'em hostages to fortune and then I'd have *had* to kill him!"

Which didn't enlighten Miss Culvert very much. She had a one-way mind, and while the Connexion contained many humorists, she was not one of them. Mrs. Giffel, in her opinion, was "strange."

She was. She had wit, which in England, in spite of its reputation, is always strange in a small place. She "took people off." Mr. Giffel had died before Mrs. Giffel, with Cicely in tow, came to South Barnet to live in Haythorne Terrace. According to Mrs. Giffel, her husband was either a lunatic of genius or else a mere fabrication of his widow's lively fancy. Anything unusually preposterous, Mrs. Giffel would attribute to "my poor Giffel."

This was really her only point of resemblance to Mrs. Mills, who had a repertory of brilliant yet devout aphorisms which she qualified with "as poor dear Willy used to say." Poor dear Willy was a comprehensible human being even if he was, according to Mrs. Mills, a trifle "too good for human

nature's daily food." Mr. Giffel, on the other hand, seemed to have spent his entire life on earth saying nasty things about people who had never done him any harm. Of Mr. Kitching's fiery whiskers, for example, Mrs. Giffel mumbled, "He speaks from out of a burning bush, as poor Giffel put it." Mrs. Giffel, in short, was the yeast in the dough, to use her own simile, and she took a great delight in leavening the whole lump. Mrs. Mills had another duty. She was a social force, "something, not ourselves, making for righteousness" (Mrs. Giffel again!); and while some of the plainer folk at the chapel could not abide her and her "poor dear Willy," she was well liked. And certainly her daughter Lillian was more acceptable than Cicely. Only Mrs. Mills pronounced it Lily Ann.

Mrs. Giffel had two lodgers most of the time, and made no secret of the fact that she liked to have men in the house. "Let 'em all come, send 'em on to me," she would quote jocosely when that song became popular. And she was successful, in a rough and scrambling way. Young Smith, her star boarder, swore by her, and Mrs. Giffel, when she heard of it, guffawed and hoped he wouldn't tell 'em how he swore *at* her when the marmalade was all gone. Mr. Smith was in "a secretarial position in the city" and his fellow lodger, Mr. Sandys, was assistant to one of the rising merchants of South Barnet, Mr. Lovett. Lovett's shop was hardware, but clinging to this and occupying Lovett himself more and more, were

other interests: a coal-order office, a timber yard, a real-estate agency, a bicycle-repair shop, and a reaching out after strong contracts for the workhouse. He was a dry, difficult person, Lovett, with a trim brown beard, and being a bicycle enthusiast from the first, always wore knickerbockers and a soiled Norfolk jacket. Young Sandys could be seen all day behind a barricade of assorted hardware in the shop, or perched on the top of a very high ladder trying to look into an inaccessible drawer for a certain kind of bolt for somebody's conservatory. Smith envied him. "You're *doing* something, my boy," he would say, leaving the other to assume that Smith himself, by virtue of his eminent position in the city, never got a chance to do anything. Like many other sayings by Smith it had a merely figurative bearing on the case, and was useful chiefly as an index to the fanatical enthusiast who walked about in Smith's body. A very long body, with short legs, surmounted by a large, plain, yet vivacious face and wet-looking hair; Mrs. Giffel called him "a wolf in sheep's clothing" because he went to chapel regularly and was fond of cards. But Smith's reason for going to chapel was not wolfish at all. He had leanings toward respectability and improving his position. From this he never rested. He had ideas —inventions. But, as he told young Sandys, it needed capital.

So there they were, the tenants of Haythorne Terrace out on Chapel Fields by the waterworks, one

summer evening when Mr. Heath came down to preside at the high tea in the front room, and Hazel, after washing her hands at the scullery sink and drying them on the roller towel behind the door, came bounding in with some thrilling news. The Kitchings were having tea, Mrs. Mills was giving tea to Miss Culvert and a young student minister who had come over from the Seminary to hold the Wednesday evening service, and Mrs. Giffel's voice could be heard at times as she fed Cicely and her two "young gentlemen." Above the clink of teacups and murmur of voices could be heard the clucking of Mrs. Heath's fowls and the rumble of the waterworks.

First, however, Mr. Heath said grace. He never missed it and never varied it. For what they were about to receive the Lord was to make them truly thankful. Mrs. Giffel reckoned a good appetite was the best grace and she would intone "Lay on, MacDuff!" in supposed imitation of Henry Irving, who would have been astonished had he heard it. Mrs. Mills, on this particular evening had, of course, asked the student to perform and he responded with the neatest possible seminarial invocation to the Almighty to bless the muffins and bloater paste awaiting the onslaught. They were discussing the tea meeting at the chapel on the following night, when in the house next door Mr. Heath, without looking at Hazel, was reproving her for bounding.

"My dear," he remarked, opening his napkin,

"is that quite the way for nice little girls to enter the room?"

Hazel was a problem. She would have been a problem to any parents. She was dark, like the rest of them save Lena, who had lightish hair, and her bones were extraordinarily thin. Her limbs were so slender one could imagine them snapping. Her face was sharp, with smooth transparent features and gray eyes behind thick glasses which seemed to see nothing. In very truth Hazel's eyes saw a great many things. They were blotting up scene after scene and sentence after sentence that her parents and sisters forgot almost at once. Those short-sighted eyes sized up even Mrs. Giffel and stowed her away in a dark corner of a mind like a filing cabinet. There she was, along with dozens of other people, shut up in the dark part of Hazel's mind until the time came to use her, and then out she came, transfigured and glorious!

"No, Father dear," agreed Hazel. "It isn't. Mother, Francis Striker's come home from school in Germany and he's brought a French boy with him."

"Are you sure he's French?" said Kate nervously. "I rather thought he was German." Kate was sixteen and a pupil teacher. There was no difficulty in telling the twins apart now.

Fanny came in with a plate of bread and butter. Fanny was a pretty girl.

"You mean you *hope* he's German," said Hazel

wickedly. Kate compressed her lips and was silent. But her mother rendered her caution useless.

"Now, Hazel, why on earth should you say that?"

"Why, dear mother, don't you see?" moaned the delighted Hazel. "Kate's been making such a *splash* with her French, she'll have to talk to him and *entertain* him. Can't you hear her? 'Have you the pen of my aunt's grandmother? No, but the cat of my uncle is dead.' Won't that entertain him? My goodness!"

"He may speak English," suggested Mrs. Heath quietly, her eye travelling around the table to make sure everyone was supplied. "Hazel, pass your sisters the jam."

"Well, we'll hope he does, for his own sake," said Hazel, passing as she was bid, "or we won't ever know how Kate's French sounds to a foreigner."

"You seem to know a lot about him," said Katie, stirring her tea dreamily.

"Oh, tons about him," agreed the alert Hazel. "He has two trunks, terrible-looking things, a portmanteau made of basket-stuff, and he wears socks like a little boy of six. And he's seventeen at least."

"And how does my little girl know how old he is?" put in Mr. Heath magisterially.

"You can tell easily," she assured him. "There's a sort of fuzz on their faces after fifteen, and they look as if they wished they hadn't any hands at all."

"And you mean to tell me," broke in Kate, "that he is going round with his legs *bare?*"

"Well, if you don't believe me, you can go and look at his legs yourself. There's a hole in the wall behind the Lodge where you can see everything. They're having tea on the lawn now, I dare say."

"Hazel, have you been looking through holes in fences?" asked her mother, rather upset.

"Oh, *no*, dear Mother. I saw them when I was going past the station. I only suggested that *Katie* could go and have a look. *I'd* never do a thing like that." The emphasis Hazel put on some of her words made the whole explanation sound like a chant, an anthem in praise of a certain sprightly virgin. She rubbed her nose wickedly and added: "Francis Striker's dreadfully tall, Mother."

"You seem to have been staring dreadfully hard, Hazel," said Katie.

"And you seem to be dreadfully jealous you weren't there, Katie darling."

"The custom of the countries on the Continent differs somewhat from ours, my dear," was heard from the bearded person whom Hazel had been taught to revere as her male parent. Her quick, agile mind had made many leaps to and fro as she pondered the problem of her father. She had sat holding her mother's hand when the tired woman was keeping herself in by mere force of character and when she would have collapsed at the first spoken word of sympathy. Hazel was sharp. She

understood her mother's peculiar problem very early in life. At times she would regard her father, as he sat reading the paper in his regal way, an elvish air of tip-toe expectancy on her thin little face, as though waiting for him to vanish in a blue flame, or diminish suddenly to the size of a pea, or perhaps explode and cover her with purple stars. Once she clapped her hands as the notion of him bursting struck her, and he had remarked that little girls should be seen and not heard. But this time, as Mr. Heath began on Continental customs, upon which he was only scantily posted, Hazel composed herself hastily and, stirring her tea in an irritating manner, said, "Yes, Father dear."

Mr. Heath might have run on in a general way until he ran out of information had not his wife spoken to Katie in a way that was the opposite of general.

"Is this foreign boy *staying* with the Strikers?" she asked quietly. "I mean for long?"

"I don't know, Mother. Adelaide Kitching heard her father say Mr. Striker's very upset. He was snapping everybody's head off the other day. And they say it's because Francis has been expelled."

"Well, I can hardly blame him," said Mrs. Heath. "He was always different from his brothers and sisters. I'm sorry for Mrs. Striker, I am indeed."

"Well, Mother, Adelaide Kitching says Mrs. Striker takes his part."

Katie did not tell her mother all that the maids at

the Lodge had told Adelaide and herself. She knew Mrs. Heath disliked what she called "servants' tattle."

Mrs. Heath did not answer. Septima was crying, owing to some direct action on the part of Margaret, and she rose to comfort the ewe lamb. The feeling in her heart was, "Ah, and would not I, had I a son!"

There were moments in the life of this faithful wife and mother, this devout Christian, when she doubted God's goodness. Seven and not one a son!

Mrs. Giffel, whose vagabonding mind had roved over that same problem, had ejaculated to herself in her hoarse voice, "And the Lord pity him, if one had been a son!" Mrs. Giffel was not a mere noisy humbug. She "took people off," but she saw things clearly and saw them pretty nearly whole. She predicted to herself "a fine kettle of fish anyway" when those seven dynamic creatures "began to go off like dynamite, ho-ho!" and she saw a mercy in the lack of boys. She contented herself with calling Haythorne Terrace, Seven Sisters Road, and making jocular noises at the back of her big good-humoured mouth.

"Yes, my dear," Mr. Heath was saying to Fanny as he rose to retire—night air was bad for him—"Yes, my dear, parts of the edible frog, the *Rana Esculenta*, are highly esteemed on the Continent as a table delicacy."

Hazel watched his broad back make its slow

passage through the door and move out of sight up the narrow stairway. What was he saying? she asked herself dreamily. *Rana Esculenta.* She heard Katie whispering. What was Francis Striker's friend's name?—A breathless bundle of possessives.

"How should I know?" she retorted absently. Then, waking up, she drank the rest of her tea at a gulp, spooned up the sugar upon a pink tongue and added: "Rana Esculenta, for all I know, Katie. A table delicacy!"

"Hazel!" hissed Katie, "I think you're a horrid little cleverdick."

Hazel giggled. She was not displeased.

CHAPTER II

THAT was Hazel's way. She had seen nothing of any bare-legged French schoolboy at the station. She had no real knowledge of French schoolboys beyond having read in some book that they did not wear trousers. She actually had noticed, a long way off and just turning into the newly laid out Haythorne Road, a four-wheeled cab with some trunks on the roof. Upon this slender framework of fact she had erected a fantastic story which puzzled her mother and exasperated her sisters. The trouble with Hazel was her entire lack of conscience when she began *telling* anything. It was not that she told lies so much as that she was unaware of the existence of truth. The moment she had overheard Adelaide Kitching telling Fanny about "the Striker boy," who was at a foreign school where he was very unhappy and his mother had sent for him to come home and he was coming and bringing a chum with him, her imagination began working upon the information. While Adelaide was taking breath for another tremendous sentence, Hazel had seen, in her mind's eye, those two arriving. She simply had to see them before anybody else. And when she came out of school that afternoon she cut across the

fields behind the Lodge and took a long look through a hole in the fence behind the summerhouse. But beyond a close-up of Mr. Kitching's check shirt and broad red suspenders as he worked bent double over a herbaceous border, Hazel received no corroboration of her lively imagination. And so her family received the product of her unshackled fancy.

It is difficult to conceive, at this distant date, how strongly the notion of a foreigner coming into the neighbourhood worked in the minds of the inhabitants. There was Fanny Heath, who imagined all aliens were dark, like the Italian organ grinder and his wife who arrived every Saturday afternoon and ground out tune after tune until Mrs. Mills sent Lily Ann to the door with a halfpenny. There was Mrs. Mills herself, whose passion for music carried her clear into opera, and who spoke of Grisi and Tittoni and Tagliaferro as though they were old friends. There was Mrs. Giffel, who vociferously announced that to her music was "an agreeable noise," but saw no reason why the English should look down on anybody. The sun never set on the British Empire, so Mrs. Giffel quoted her husband, "because the Lord didn't trust it in the dark." There was Miss Culvert, finally, who shuddered at the idea of a foreigner coming to West Barnet at all. To Miss Culvert they were much worse than the heathen to whom she helped to send missionaries. They were papists! And being intensely evangelistic, with a Bible class of her own, a shrill and penetrating

tremolo voice for prayer, and enjoying at times an almost corybantic ecstasy during revivals, Miss Culvert could not help regarding the inhabitants of the continent of Europe as heretics. And there was Mr. Smith in particular, who posed as the local authority on foreign parts, having been to Boulogne "on his 'olidays," and who had subsequently read a side-splitting description of the French nation to the Literary and Debating Society at the Wesleyan Chapel.

And the first authentic news of the arrivals at the Lodge was brought to the outer world by Mrs. Mills. In spite of her genteel air and refined piety at the chapel, Mrs. Mills did not permit very much to happen without being in it. When Mrs. Mills applied her elaborate *rat-a-tat-tat-TAT* to your knocker she generally got in. Her persistent deep mourning for "dear Willy" daunted the most frigid householders when they opened the door a few inches to see who was there. She suffered slightly from a skin affection which gave her face the appearance of a battered old copper mask, while from a small aperture came her voice, deep and resonant and reverberating behind her heavy black veil. Quite a different voice from Mrs. Giffel's jovial and lantern-jawed boom. Mrs. Mills was a gentlewoman and had seen better days. Mrs. Giffel was an original being who might easily see better days in the future. To entertain a meeting Mrs. Giffel was a signal success, but it took Mrs. Mills's imposing personality and irresistible persuasion to get them there.

She told Miss Culvert about it over a cup of tea and a biscuit. The tea meeting was at half past six and there was no sense in preparing a meal at home. She had called at the Lodge that morning to sell the last three tickets she had left. The door was opened by "such a natty little maid, my dear!" who ushered her at once into "a perfectly charming morning room! Such taste! The carpet is Aubusson, with felt under, I'm sure, and the overmantel is really good. And then as I was admiring the Landseer—a stag and gillies, you know—Mrs. Striker came in and really greeted me as an old friend. My dear, I'm quite sure she is of good family. Poor dear Willy always said my instinct in matters of breeding was sound. That was the word the dear boy used—sound. I was at ease at once. And the way she accepted the tickets as though *we* were doing *her* a favour——!"

"I shouldn't have dared—she being Church," said Miss Culvert, brushing crumbs of biscuit from her lap.

"My dear, that's where you make a mistake. The Strikers are Church, but not High. Extremely Broad. And in any case, it is the duty of people of means to patronize all worthy local objects. Really, had I known how very friendly Mrs. Striker is, I would have called before. But it is so necessary to avoid the slightest appearance of *toadying*, you know."

The word came out in a resonant clang of deep

feeling. Miss Culvert was impressed and virtually shone in the reflected Striker glory beaming from Mrs. Mills as she recounted her adventures of the morning. For she had seen both Master Francis Striker and his foreign friend Louis Chaillu. "Such gentlemanly young fellows, my dear. Quite courtly manners!"

"I suppose the Misses Striker will be setting their caps at him, even if he is a Roman Catholic," said Miss Culvert, primly.

"My dear, I should imagine nothing of the kind. He is much younger than either Miss Elsa or Miss Lucia. Not more than seventeen, I should say. Mrs. Striker was good enough to hint in confidence that he has come over to study as a civil engineer with Master Francis. I think it is such a fine career," added Mrs. Mills with relish, although she had no information on the subject whatever. "And I believe it is a fact—although, of course, I could not possibly refer to it during a friendly call—that Master Francis inherits under his aunt Frances Striker's will."

"I am really glad," said Miss Culvert, "that the young man is not going into his father's business. I really do wish we hadn't a wine merchant in West Barnet as well as beer. The Haythornes, you know."

Mrs. Mills did know. The enormous revenues of the Haythornes were drawn from beer. On every other tavern from Barnet to London and on many a London hostelry the words shone in gold and black

over the windows: "Haythorne's Entire" and "Haythorne's Fine London Ales." Every day the great wagons left Haythorne's Brewery in the Minories and lumbered away in all directions to quench the mighty thirst of Londoners for Haythorne's ales. And this had gone on for two hundred years. The first Haythorne had been a friend of William III. Yeomen had discussed the flight of James II over tankards of Haythorne's XXX. Queen Victoria, spending a night at the King's Arms at Harringay on her way to Norwich, had drunk Haythorne's Stout, and the bottled product thenceforth bore the magic words "Purveyors to Her Majesty."

And the Strikers, to Miss Culvert's real discomfort, were wine and spirit merchants. Old Mr. Striker was a gentleman in a white top hat, white mutton-chop whiskers, white vest and white spats, and resembled the pictures of John Bull by Beardsley and Beerbohm. His father had come over from Hanover in 1820, and spelled his name Streicher, but as Mr. Striker used to say with a smile, "the Royal Family came from Hanover too," and that shut up everybody. Striker and Selby had a warehouse in a dirty, dark little court off Dufferin Street where the other two Striker boys, Albert and Nicholas, ruled over a dozen clerks and made entries in enormous brass-edged ledgers while perched on high stools. Striker and Selby had "correspondents" in Bordeaux and Oporto who purchased wine for them, and they had lately got hold of a bankrupt distillery in Perth-

shire. Striker and Selby were on the rise. They were both members of old city companies, both freemen of the City of London, and Selby had been an Alderman for a number of years. Warm man, Selby. Lived in a square mansion near Jack Straw's Castle on Hampstead Heath. Striker dined once a month at Hampstead and Selby came over just as regularly to Barnet with Mrs. Selby in his great yellow-wheeled landau drawn by two gray horses. All this was tremendously impressive to Miss Culvert's mind, yet she couldn't help wishing West Barnet was not so very much in "the Trade." Mrs. Mills was diplomatic. She respected Miss Culvert's principles and refrained from mentioning that she had been offered a glass of sherry and a biscuit. Poor dear Willy always said wine was a good servant but a bad master and you couldn't make men righteous by act of parliament. But the partaking of a little refreshment in such refined company had no possible bearing on what was ever in Miss Culvert's mind—the terrible scenes outside the Black Swan on Saturday night, when the naphtha flares swung above the whelk stalls and men and women danced in the roadway and actually got *intoxicated*, and *fought* and were LOCKED UP! It never occurred to Miss Culvert that they enjoyed themselves, just as she enjoyed herself at the Friday night prayer meeting. That was the great moment in the life of this sainted spinster, when Mr. Saunders, who conducted the "experiences," said in a respectful tone:

"Sister Culvert will bear witness for Christ."

And bear it she did. There was a silence in the chapel for a moment, all heads bowed in prayer save one or two of the younger and unconverted, who took a furtive peep at the back pew, where Miss Culvert was slowly rising to her feet, her eyes shut tight, one gloved hand on her flat bosom, rising, rising, as though she were a veritable emanation of holiness, her sharp ascetic features set in a mask of ecstasy. And then came the first thrilling invocation in the voice that made one think, as Mrs. Mills said, that she was inspired, clear yet far away, as of a spirit—"To thee-ee-ee, our Heavenly Father, we-ee-ee come this night . . ." and the spell was cast.

That was Miss Culvert. Here in Mrs. Mills's front room listening to the doings of "publicans and sinners" she was like an artist resting. The economic aspects of alcohol did not come home to Miss Culvert or she might have discovered that the bank in which her money was invested and the insurance company who sent her a check every quarter carried large parcels of Haythorne & Co.'s brewery stock. It may be doubted if Miss Culvert would have understood if you had explained. She was an artist in her own line and it was impossible for her to be more than mildly interested in the other departments of spiritual life. She simply wished that they had not wines and spirits as well as beer.

Mrs. Mills was glad when Lillian created a diver-

sion by coming down all dressed for the tea meeting. Lillian was thirteen and seemed to have inherited something of her mother's poor complexion. In spite of copious doses of iron and quinine tonics, Lillian's face was far from clear. She had beautiful hair, however, ashen brown in colour, cascading from her round little head in one broad, glistening curtain. It had the smooth texture and consistency of a sheet of polished metal. Mrs. Giffel said it would be a disaster if Lillian didn't marry a minister. She had the temperament and the complexion and Mrs. Mills would see to it she was getting the training.

"All ready, darling?" said Mrs. Mills in her deep resonant tones, and Lillian murmured, "Yes, Mamma." She had on a dress of blue velvet with the waist high up under her armpits, and falling away in a single curve to a little below the knees, where a few inches of lace-edged pantalettes afforded a curious contrast to the high buttoned boots of patent leather. It was a costume admirably adapted to a function like a tea meeting, where Lillian would be able to get it well plastered with jam and bread and butter while her mother was busy with her urn, filling countless cups of tea. Lillian's brown eyes were alight with expectancy. She could not visualize the penalty that would follow next day as certainly as the rising of the sun. It was a case of the human mind knowing without comprehending. "My untidy little girl!" Mrs. Mills would observe austerely as she held up the dress and decree an hour extra of scales

on the piano and half an hour's backboard exercise. How Lillian hated that backboard! Yet there was a certain grim compensation at work here. Without a complexion and without any startling mental equipment, Lillian's chances were poor indeed if her spine showed the slightest curvature or her fingers lacked the necessary flexibility to evoke the accompaniments to songs in Zion.

Lillian did not go to the board school. She attended Miss Bellows's academy for young ladies in the Station Road. You would not believe it from a casual encounter with her, but she was being instructed in "mathematics and the use of the globes." She trotted home each afternoon with a small library, augmented by a pencil box of amazing complexity, under her arm. Lillian had very few sharp images or desires in her mind. She dwelt continually in the shadow of those two formidable adults, her mother and Miss Culvert, so that she was in danger of becoming entirely an amiable little automaton. Yet there was a human soul stirring somewhere in Lillian because she chose this afternoon to broach a difficult subject.

"Mamma, can I give Miss Bellows my name for dancing and deportment? All the girls are taking it next winter. Can I, Mamma?"

"We'll have to see about it, darling," said Mrs. Mills diplomatically, arranging the gigantic bow of black watered silk between Lillian's shoulder blades. Miss Culvert was against dancing for the same reason

that she opposed wine. In Miss Culvert's mind floated a dreadful picture of a party of men and women, the latter extremely décolleté and holding aloft champagne glasses in wild abandon, while the gentlemen, all with black moustaches and sideburns, smoked large cigars. It would be easy to deride this attitude on the part of Miss Culvert, but it must be pointed out that she was sincere. The very thought of a man's arm about her waist was unpleasant. When she sang, in her shrill soprano—

"A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky"—

Miss Culvert meant every word of it. Beyond the cloistral felicity of Haythorne Terrace there roared the great wicked world, and Miss Culvert shrank from it as from a jungle of wild beasts. She felt much more comfortable when talking to God than to man anyhow. She looked sadly at Lillian, thinking of those bare-armed sirens waving wineglasses.

"Think of the example, my child," she murmured. "We are placed in the forefront of the battle that we may wear the helmet of faith and put on the armour of the spirit." And she sighed.

Lillian's lip quivered a little. She did so want to join the class with the other girls. How little parents realize the frightful agonies they impose upon their offspring by their callous disregard of

this fundamental instinct. Mrs. Mills stroked Lillian's hair gently.

"I think my darling had better wait until next year," she chanted, smiling.

"Oh, no, Mamma!" And the tears came in two straight crystal cataracts down the little cheeks.

"Children obey your parents, for this is right," quoted Miss Culvert, deriving an obscure enjoyment from Lillian's distress. It was a pity that young maiden had not consulted Mrs. Giffel, who would have drawn her long lantern jaws into a sardonic smile and reminded her audience at the top of her voice that Saint Paul also instructed parents not to provoke their children to wrath. Lillian did not think of it. Lillian was incapable of thought. She only saw, through her tears, two iron old women who wanted her to be desperately unhappy. And she stood there, the tears running off her chin upon her blue velvet dress, obliging them to the full. Only the immediate necessity of proceeding to the chapel to arrange all the details of the evening prevented Mrs. Mills and Miss Culvert enjoying Lillian's misery for another half hour. They rose.

"There, there!" ejaculated Miss Culvert with almost secular jollity. "You are trying to make your mother late for the meeting. Oh, fie, Lillian! What would Miss Bellows say if she saw you now?"

The elastic of a coquettish little sailor straw hat was snapped under Lillian's quivering chin, and she was told to go and play with Hazel Heath, who was

swinging on the gate of Number Two. Lillian, in her present deplorable condition, would much rather have played with an armful of poisonous reptiles than with Hazel, who had all the hardy qualities of a precocious child brought up in the callous environment of a large and impecunious family.

"Dear Lillian is so sensitive to reproof," intoned Mrs. Mills as they filled the tray with the tea things.

"You must be firm with her," remarked Miss Culvert.

"Oh, of course!" Mrs. Mills agreed, but resenting the spinster's counsel all the same. "But do you know, I have often wondered if dear Lillian was not set apart for some unusual career. I was thinking only this morning when the young fellow at the Lodge, Louis Chaillu—such a very distinguished-looking blond type, you know—bowed to me when he was presented, how easily it might happen that he and Lillian should come to care—the difference in age is *nothing* you know—and it would be so *much* to her advantage if she had all the accomplishments of good society."

Miss Culvert sighed. She felt Mrs. Mills was inclined to stress overmuch the carnal things of life. She tied the strings of her bonnet in a mood of mild exultation at being so easily the superior in spiritual vitality, so much more impervious to the snares of the world.

When Hazel saw Lillian come down the garden path she stopped swinging on the gate and lounged

along the low fence where hollyhocks, sunflowers, and sweet briar screened the cottages from the road. It was not so long since Hazel, who had an evil genius for finding weak spots in one's moral armour, would have done a sort of war dance round Lillian, chanting:

"Lillian Mills, Lillian Mills,
Fell downstairs and took some pills!"

The sting in this had always been a mystery even to parents who had overhead it, but it bore hard on Lillian because she was forbidden to retaliate. Mrs. Mills prescribed disdain. "Treat them as though they were beneath you, Lillian darling," which was easy to say but terribly difficult to achieve. But now, with Hazel herself turned fifteen and Lillian in her thirteenth year, the tactics had changed. Hazel sidled along the fence and remained leaning against it watching Lillian emerge from the garden.

"Oh, no, Mamma!" mimicked Hazel softly.

"Four eyes!" breathed Lillian walking past with her tear-stained nose in the air.

"Oh, *no*, Mamma!" repeated Hazel, who was already an artist and knew the value of keeping the knife in the wound. Lillian began to run a little. The tears came again but she resolutely kept her hands from her face lest Hazel should divine the reason. Lillian had a handkerchief but it was fastened to her pocket with a safety pin.

And then Mrs. Mills and Miss Culvert came out

and smiled benignly upon the spectacled Hazel, who smiled and returned their greeting.

"Good evening, Mrs. Mills! Good evening, Miss Culvert."

And Hazel's social duties were over for the day.

She was growing to have very little patience with the world as she found it because it bore so small a resemblance to the riotously teeming universe in her own head. People in Haythorne Terrace and even down at the school called Hazel a horribly matter-of-fact child, which was true; but they omitted to remark how she was already struggling in her spirit to escape from childhood. There were times when Hazel felt a sudden terror that she would never grow up, and indulged in a mad prankishness that made her mother ask if she had lost her senses.

"What *is* the matter with you?" Mrs. Heath asked irritably, looking up from her sewing. She was hurrying to finish so she could go to the public meeting which was always held after the tea in the chapel.

"I'm a mad woman, Mother," said Hazel mysteriously. "I've got spazzums in my mind." And she danced.

"Have you?" returned her mother. "Perhaps if you went out and helped Lena with the dishes, you'd feel better."

"Of course, that's the very thing, dear Mother. I'll go at once." And she went on dancing mysteriously in front of her mother, slender as a wraith,

her eyes enlarged in the thick glasses, her mobile mouth pursed up in an elvish smile. Her mother glanced up sharply and seemed filled with suspicion, but she made no comment. She knew Hazel.

"Mother, when all the dishes are washed and dried, *and* put away, can I go for a walk? Just a teeny-weeny little walk. There's a moon to-night."

"Katie and Fanny are going to the meeting," objected Mrs. Heath quietly.

"Lena's here, and Father."

"Hazel."

"Yes, Mother."

"Why do you want to go for a walk?"

"Mother, it is so beautiful to be out there on the hill, all alone."

Mrs. Heath sighed as her needle flew in and out. She did not quite see her way to tell her daughter that walking in the moonlight would increase the "spazzums in her mind." Hazel had so far developed no very evil proclivities. Nobody ever gave her a thought. She did not play much with boys in the street. They had called her a scratch cat in the past, when they pulled her hair and she drew lines on their faces with her nails. She had also perfected a method of kicking ankles that was excruciating and, in the boys' opinion, unsportsmanlike. What bothered her mother was how to explain to a girl of fifteen the spiritual dangers that lurked in the evening solitudes for anybody destined to live in a world where, if you did not work, you got no money, and

if you had no money, you did not eat. As far as Mrs. Heath could see Hazel would enter that grim area very shortly, and in a very humble capacity, in spite of her reputation for being the cleverest girl in the school. This was Mrs. Heath's attitude toward Hazel's vague yearnings to go to Dame Owen's school in London and spend an ecstatic five years or so passing fabulous examinations. "All very nice, my child," said Mrs. Heath, "if you can live on air pie and go without clothes." Fanny and Katie were earning their keep as pupil teachers, and it was Hazel's turn next to augment the family budget. She had a turn for "being fanciful," her mother was well aware. She wasn't anæmic, but she was too fond of reading library books and poetry. A shilling paper-bound copy of Lord Alfred Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" lay on Hazel's end of the mantelshelf in the tiny three-cornered bedroom in the back attic. Next it was "The Sorrows of Werther," which Hazel read over and over with a passion that young ladies nowadays would not comprehend. Half the front and all the back cover were gone, the pages dog-eared and marked heavily in pencil. Mrs. Heath was aware of these impressive external evidences of Hazel's queerness. She would have been surprised very much indeed, however, had she been able to walk into her daughter's mind, as into a marvellous antique chamber, and behold its many curious garnitures. In that strange microcosm Mr. and Mrs. Heath were the stiff-braided parents of a faëry

creature who was loved by a duke. Some whimsy made her conceive her father as a Kapellmeister, though she had but a vague conception of the word's meaning. Yes, he was a Kapellmeister, she insisted, and was employed by the duke who lived in the enchanted forest in a great stone mansion with marble porticoes. It was this sentimental nobleman's habit to desert the scenes of revelry by night upon his porticoes and the velvet sward of his lawns to steal through his ancestral trees and hold a tryst with the Kapellmeister's lovely daughter. This was his grief, that he could never persuade the wild elfin creature to brave the cynosure of every eye and, on his arm, permit him to lead her to her rightful place in the great drawing room hung with be-wigged and stern-visaged ancestors. She always shrank back into the shadows of the ancestral trees, permitting him to kiss her lily hand and to hope that in years to come he might prove worthy of her. And always, just as he was driven to a perfect frenzy of passion and endeavoured to snatch a kiss from her ruby lips, she would spring away with the grace of a faun, her silvery laughter sounding like fairy music in the grove while the baffled scion of an ancient house pursued his love in vain.

And the scene of this romantic encounter, by an almost unbelievable coincidence, was an exact replica of that part of Haythorne's Woods where the road to Sybil Fosters ran near to Haythorne House, soon after crossing the brook, and where one could

discern among the trees the stately colonnades of the mansion. There was even a particular tree startlingly similar to the one on which the duke and the Kapellmeister's daughter had carved their initials with two hearts entwined, for this duke, against all ducal precedent, carried a serviceable jack knife such as Lovett's sold retail for one and six. It might yet befall that at the foot of this tree the lifeless body of fair Ellaline would be found with a single red knife thrust over the heart—the victim of aristocratic despair. Hazel's explanation of this remarkable performance on the part of her other self was that she "bled inwardly," a phrase she had picked up somehwere. But the whole tragic business remained in abeyance because Hazel had a reluctance to commit suicide in imagination just yet. She had another "spazzum in her mind," a rich and horrible conception wherein she became the bride of the duke, and he was immediately despatched by an autocratic emperor to the centre of Asia to put down an insurrection of serfs. Hazel was not honest with herself about the middle part of this episode, she was so anxious to dwell upon the end of it, where the Duke after years of putting down insurrections came back to his ancestral porticoes and vestibules and called up the ancient stairway to his beloved in accents of ineffable tenderness, "El-laline!" And as he followed along the ghostly corridors he caught a glimpse of flying draperies and a silvery laugh as she vanished round the next corner.

And he went mad in this tale, which is easily believed, pursuing what? A wraith? A woman? Only the silvery laugh replied, and he hurled himself to the tessellated floor below.

Mrs. Heath was entirely ignorant of all this going on under her very nose. She hadn't the slightest knowledge of the fact that she was a Mrs. Kapellmeister, so she simply sighed and continued to sew very fast. There was a particularly good speaker coming to the chapel that evening and she was in a hurry to get away.

"Can I, Mother?" persisted Hazel. "I'll see they're all clean and everything tidied up."

"You must be in by half-past nine," said her mother.

"Thank you, darling Mother," said Ellaline, and she danced away to the little scullery where she found Lena sloshing dishes round in the sink. The reason why Hazel took very little notice of Lena was that the latter had no existence in Hazel's private world. It is amazing how slender is our hold on life in the minds of others. Ellaline, alas, was the Kapellmeister's only daughter.

CHAPTER III

LENA had very little existence at all apart from the work she did in the house. And yet, in mere corporeal size, in height and breadth, in the thickness of her arms and the strength of her body, she existed much more completely than Hazel, who was a year older. But in some way or other it was always Lena's job to do the things that required a minimum of spectacular personality, like washing the dishes and giving the younger children their bath. There was even an inarticulate theory in the family that Lena liked doing such chores, and also that there was nothing very commendable in her willingness, since it was a privilege to toil in the home. It was assumed that she would get it all back "when she came to have a home of her own." Lena herself had never commented upon this notion. She was only in the Sixth Standard now, when she ought to have been close behind Hazel in the Seventh. Another reason why she may be said to have lacked distinction was that she was nearly as big as Fanny and so had to wear Fanny's clothes. And this has a depressing effect on anybody's personality. So far, moreover, from competing with her elder sisters in cleverness, or asserting herself in any way, she did

not try. During the wrangles at the crowded meal table Lena remained dumb save when somebody swept the last piece from the plate and she asked curtly, "Any more?" Or if some neighbour's child came to get a package of the tea Mrs. Heath sold at twopence a pound profit, Lena seemed always destined to rise and get it. The idea was that Lena, being rather dull at her studies, should be content with a dull life—an excellent notion from the point of view of the clever. But Lena made no protest, or none that appeared to her elders to have any bearing on the subject. She had complained once that her dresses were too short, but it is doubtful if this would have carried much weight if there had been no holes in the knees of her stockings. And she had said something about a boa. Boas were seventeen and six at least, supposing you went to Upper Street, Islington, which meant a long walk and twopence on the steam tram. Even Mrs. Heath thought Lena was wandering in her mind when she talked of boas.

For the most part, however, Lena accepted the position of drudge with remarkably little comment. Unless occasion imperatively demanded it, she did not reply when spoken to. Mr. Heath diagnosed this as inherited thoughtfulness, and he may have been right, though he omitted to specify the ancestor responsible for the trait. Mrs. Heath wondered at times whether Doctor Ffoulkes hadn't better have a look at Lena. She seemed well, though.

She was certainly well or she could never have

worked so hard in that kitchen and scullery at the back of the house in Haythorne Terrace. Dora, who was thirteen, was delicate. Doctor Ffoulkes had prescribed plenty of fresh milk, fruit, and nourishing cereals for Dora. Also meat extract. Dora, a dark, spindling little creature, without either Hazel's verve and mental quickness or Lena's adequate bodily equipment, tended to engage Margaret and Septima, the baby, in combats over imaginary infringements of the law of property. Dora's most frequent remark, made at the top of her thin reedy voice, was, "It's mine, I tell you!" Then followed as a rule a battle royal with the two younger children. She was really backward in mental development and had a puling desire to make her mark in history in the manner of many other and better-known tyrants—by leaving a trail of destruction and sorrow behind her. Dora had no sporting spirit, and meat extract, even when there is money to pay for it, cannot build up the tissues of the character. One would have imagined a dozen years lay between her and Lena, especially on bath night. She was as easy to bathe as a full-grown tom-cat, and about as grateful when it was done.

So Lena, when Hazel danced into the kitchen to help her wash the dishes, had no illusions. Mrs. Heath herself was not fully aware of the very sketchy nature of the help the others gave Lena. Katie and Fanny, who took the domestic economy course and attended the gas company's lectures on advanced cooking,

which somehow caused an advance in the gas bill, while Lena stayed at home and cleaned up, would often show Lena how to get things done quicker. But something always took them out of the kitchen for a moment, and by the time they got back Lena had done it the wrong way, as usual. People like Lena are very trying. They have no initiative. They never experiment or learn to improve their methods. Fanny and Katie wondered what sort of a home it would be if Lena had no one to tell her. It never occurred to them to wonder what would happen if Lena went to bed and left them to shift for themselves.

As far as could be ascertained, Lena had no inkling of the fact that, according to Hazel's private version of their family history, she herself had never been born. She had never heard of a Kapellmeister or his lovely daughter, who was adored by a duke. Lena's mental range hovered round *Chatterbox* serials and the *Illustrated London News*. When it came to pictures Lena wiped her hands hastily on her apron and had a good long look. She liked pretty things, things with shape and colour, and it is possible she was dimly aware she had a good shape and colour herself. But she could not gabble fluently about her fancies; she lacked entirely a sense of the poetry of life or even of the pleasures of wit that Mrs. Giffel enjoyed so keenly. Her liking for pictures did not indicate any executive artistic ability, and Mr. Heath, who had read little bits in weekly papers

about phrenology, said Lena was merely philoprogenitive. Which must have meant a great deal to Lena, scrubbing Margaret and Septima in front of the kitchen fire, or preparing Dora's milk with an egg beaten into it.

"Mother says I've got to help," said Hazel, reaching for a dry dishcloth, "and then I'm going out."

"I heard you," said Lena.

"Well, no need to get in a wax," observed Hazel, setting a dry plate in the rack very neatly. "I suppose I can go out if I want to, can't I?"

"Friday's always bath night for the children," said Lena stolidly, "and Mother's going to the chapel."

"Why should I always be expected to do it?" said Hazel bitterly.

"Oh, I'll do it; you needn't bother."

"Darling Lena!"

Lena said nothing. Her arms, round and startlingly white, were bare, the short sleeves of her blouse rolled to the shoulder, her neck and bosom glistened with a delicate moisture, and the soft fabric clung to the charming maturity of the cupped breasts. Her gray eyes were bent to her task and an expression of passionless docility was spread over her face. It was as though Fate had chosen this method of obscuring her character from the cleverer folk around her.

She lifted out the forks and spoons and laid them in an old pudding dish to drain while she dried her hands on the roller towel hanging on the door. Then, with a dexterity derived from constant daily

practice, she dried and polished and put away. This was her life. She had been born in this house. She left it every weekday to spend dull hours in the school, and on Sundays she sat in church beside her father, "quiet as a stone," nursing Septima when that young lady felt a sudden need of consolation, and watching the profile of Elsa Striker, who sat nearest in the Striker pew, and who was considered the local beauty, especially in profile. This was her life, and in the crowd of her kindred her aptitudes and dreams escaped notice. When Mrs. Heath paid one of her rare visits to Mrs. Saunders or Mrs. Hakin or Mrs. Emory, magnates of the chapel congregation, she would take Lena, who was "so fond of children" and was "such a quiet girl."

She was glad to think that soon she would leave school. The work there meant less than nothing to her simple and sensuous mind, and even the drudgery of the house, "until she would have one of her own," was less daunting to her than working for scholarships and "exhibitions," splitting her head over sums in algebra and problems in English grammar. But she did not express these sentiments. She conveyed an impression of sturdy adolescence, innocently careless about her clothes and destined for the life of an efficient housekeeper for an unimaginative artisan.

"There!" said Hazel, who had done about a third of the work, "that's done. Now I'm off."

And Lena made no reply.

The house was very quiet and the dusk of evening

had fallen as she made her methodical preparation for the weekly immersions of her younger sisters. Out at the back from behind the high brick wall of the waterworks came the muffled vibrations of the pumping engines. She refrained from lighting the lamp for a moment and walked out into the front garden to breathe the cool of the evening. Across the fields she could see the mists lying in pools of diaphanous white upon the valley. Far away sounded the musical chimes of the old church beyond the great house in the woodlands. Everywhere, even in the fields about her home, were trees, outlying sentinels and survivors of the dark forests that covered the land in ancient days from the Thames to the Humber. All her life she had heard the mystical voices of the oak leaves in the west wind, the harsh rattle of them in late autumn when the gales came roaring across the Essex lowlands, the squeak and thump of naked limbs wrestling with the north wind of January, the sibilant sigh of the tender foliage of spring. And as she stood by the gate with laurel and rose briar fragrant on either side, the tiny trumpets of the convolvulus showing suddenly white against the leaves, the passionless docility of her demeanour was ennobled into the beauty and repose of an antique statue, so still she kept in the hush of evening.

A cry roused her from her momentary absorption in the peace and quietness of the scene. She stooped quickly under the rail fence that separated the

Heaths from the Kitchings and walked with long-limbed strides to the latter's door.

"Dora!" she called. "Can I have the children now, Mrs. Kitching, please?"

There was a scuffle and a squeal down the dark entry and then Mrs. Kitching, a large and affectionate woman, appeared bearing Septima, who was crying. Septima had apparently been created without any conception of time or place. Everything Septima liked ought to go on for ever. If she was happy in Mrs. Kitching's house she could not understand why she could not remain there for ever. So she screamed, and at first it appeared as though that was going on for ever too. Septima's sense of proportion was embryonic. Lena took her and grasped Margaret's hand firmly. Margaret was sleepy.

"Come along, Dora," said Lena. "Good night, Mrs. Kitching."

The little procession trailed away down one path and up the other.

"Now you must wait till I light the lamp," Lena muttered. Then she called, "Yes, Father, in a minute."

She lit the lamp and went to the dresser to get Mr. Heath's nightly draught of port wine. It was not very good port, three shillings a bottle at the grocer's; but Doctor Ffoulkes prescribed it, and no matter how long Mr. Heath had been lying in his bed by the window upstairs, no matter how silent he was, if his port was forgotten, he called down. Lena poured

out the usual supply, put the bottle back on the highest shelf she could reach, and carried the glass carefully up to her father.

He was leaning back among his pillows, an open book lying flat under his hand, his black beard in a curly mat on his breast, so that he resembled an Assyrian bas-relief. It was a curious feature of Mr. Heath's nervous trouble that it in no way interfered with his enjoyment of the kindly fruits of the earth. He read a little and smoked a little, he ate meat, and game when it came as a present from Haythorne House, and he took wine. It was only when it came to a question of work that his system appeared at the point of collapse. Lena gave him the wine.

"Thank you, my dear," he remarked. "Isn't it time you put Dora and Margaret and Septima to bed?"

"It's bath night," said Lena, going out.

"Be sure they are thoroughly dry," Mr. Heath suggested. "Nothing so dangerous for children as a chill."

Lena went on downstairs.

Mr. Heath sipped his port and looked out over the valley. The moon was rising over the trees. Lena was getting a big girl. He had done his duty. Seven children. It was not every man who fulfilled his obligations to society so fully as that. Soon they would begin to marry off. Fanny was as good as engaged to that young Hakin. Mr. Smith, who roomed at Mrs. Giffel's, was hanging about Katie. Hazel . . .

Mr. Heath took a sip of wine. Mr. Heath had a notion as he lay there that Hazel was more of a problem than he was capable of solving. He couldn't hate any of his children, but his feelings toward Hazel were tinctured with apprehension. Hazel never asked if he was "better." Hazel seemed to think she was entitled to live her life entirely unrelated to her father's misfortune. It never occurred to her that he was still the head of the family. She was never there when he wanted anything. Lena was a good girl. Lena, when the others married, would be his companion and faithful nurse in his declining years. Little enough return for the priceless boon of life he had bestowed upon her, and the careful training her sisters gave her in taking care of the house. Lena, he decided, should always have a home. Hazel was extremely volatile. He had seen her dancing away across the fields just now—volatile. She should have been studying for the Cambridge Local. He was particularly anxious for her to go in for it at Christmas. But Hazel's cleverness was too frothy. Examinations were not really hard now, as they were in his day. He doubted if she were adapted to domestic work. And as he sipped his wine he began to wonder who that was walking across the fields toward the road that ran down into the valley. Even with his glasses and the aid of the moon he could not see. Mr. Heath's mind played with the problem. Coming from the Lodge, no doubt. Young man from

abroad. Mr. Heath was not enthusiastic about the Strikers. They were "new people," had only been in the neighbourhood ten years. And although they were Church, they had never appreciated Mr. Heath's position and his unique affliction. Here to-day and gone to-morrow people.

He took off his glasses. It was too dark to see even with the moon flooding the woodlands and meadows with her soft light. Mr. Heath drew the blind. Moonlight was bad for him. He closed his eyes, frowning at the clang of a pail being knocked over and Dora's shrieks over soap in the eye. Peace —peace, how he longed for peace. Yet there was no peace. . . . His wife would be back soon— about nine, say. He must tell her about Hazel. Hazel must not run wild.

As the question returned to his mind, of where was Hazel, he dozed, and shortly afterward slept.

Hazel had decided that the duke would propose again to the Kapellmeister's daughter that evening, and it would be difficult to convey the exaltation of her spirit as she approached the spot consecrated to the love affairs of her imagination. Hazel's excitement was derived from the notion that she did not really know what the nobleman looked like. This had happened before in his career. When Hazel was thirteen and a half and the terrifying emanations of an excitable and precocious brain evaporated to make room for a maiden's fancies, the duke

resembled Mr. Medlicott, who played the organ in church and who for one brief early summer took Katie for walks accompanied by Hazel as gooseberry. He was very good-looking, in a blond style, with a delicious auburn moustache and long elegant hands; but he dropped away after a while, and eventually married a girl who lived near Clissold Park. As Hazel grew older the duke got younger, and he might now have been mistaken for Ernie Boyce, the tallest of the choirboys singing alto. Ernie, however, supplied nothing but the mould into which was poured the spirit of Hazel's own secret conception, a shining creature without one mortal failure save his love for the faery girl who tormented him to madness.

But as she came up the lane through the wood on the farther side of the valley, Hazel's mind was busy with fresh complications for her characters. She did not mean to be cruel, but she derived an extraordinary spiritual satisfaction from the sufferings she devised. She found her favourite seat, a rail of the fence so close to a huge oak that she could lean back against the trunk and see the towers and parapets of Haythorne House in the moonlight. Closing her eyes, she began to dream. Ellaline had been ordered by her ambitious father to accept the duke. But Ellaline was, as the reader may have suspected, something like Hazel. She had Hazel's spirit, one might say. She brought terrible confusion in Kapellmeister circles by announcing that not even

for her father would she wed a patrician until the secret of his lost kinsman was revealed. Ellaline's emphasis upon this person, of whom no one had heard before, was plainly sentimental. Indeed, she admitted at once to the duke that she had found, hidden in a near-by tree, a message from the handsome young kinsman confessing a passion for her and hinting that he was being sent to the Low Countries to get him out of the way. The duke's guilt was manifest as he strode to and fro in front of the slim, beautiful creature who was testing him so cruelly.

Hazel leaned back against the great oak, her eyes closed, her brain steeped in the ecstasy of an imaginative conception. She was no longer Hazel, the little girl who cheeked her parents and made Lillian Mills cry; she was Ellaline, the lovely and courageous damsel with a suitor at her feet. Hazel floated in that wonderland of marvellous dreams reserved for those who draw their sustenance from words and phrases. There are no pictures so seductive as those evoked by half-understood words. Katie and Fanny often felt they had annihilated Hazel when she used shapeless words, pregnant with meanings beyond her years. A lot Hazel cared! For her they were magic philtres to be swallowed in secret. For her they made all things plain. They were great birds between whose broad pinions she soared into the worlds of sensuous fancy and ideal emotions. She saw the agitated master of her heart kneeling in supplication

before her, and with one hand upon her bosom she stretched out the other to caress his hair. The idea was novel and it was intoxicating. She was aware suddenly and intuitively of the power, the infinite tenderness and womanly pity implied in that simple gesture. And while her hand was hovering before her in the scented dusk of the summer night, her young mind adrift from earth in a trance of virginal emotion, Hazel heard footsteps and a murmur of words.

For a moment she remained in that pose of benediction, petrified into immobility, her eyes still closed, her heart faint with fearful shame. She felt faint and sick at the unimagined thought of discovery. Who was there? There was no sound now, yet she was sure someone was near, standing still in the darkness. Whoever it was would come up to her in a moment and then she would die!

Slowly she opened her eyes and it seemed to her darkened fancy the lids were made of iron rusted in its grooves. Her right hand drew back and touched her throat as she looked through the trees toward the lane.

What she saw out there was less shocking to her than she had foreseen. In the twilight sifting down through the leaves from the outer moonlit air she saw a youth standing on the grassy bank beside the road, his arms folded, his face raised so that he seemed to be addressing a companion hidden among the branches overhead. For he had begun to mur-

mur again, and Hazel, sitting on the fence rail a little way off, caught her breath in sheer doubt of her excited senses.

Very softly she whispered to herself, while she stared at the apparition, "My goodness! Oh, my goodness!" A shuddering wave of shyness succeeded the panic she had experienced at the imagined discovery of her secret. He was the most beautiful creature Hazel had ever seen. His blond hair rippled back from a broad white brow, his eyes were unfathomably dark in a deliciously white face as he gazed toward the moon beyond the trees, and his voice came to her like the musical murmur of distant waters, like the confused melodies of a secluded valley, and she knew not whether her mind was awake or dreaming on in a new and ravishing romance. She leaned her chin on her hand and let herself swoon gently toward the sweet sounds borne upon the magical air of night. As she hung thus between heaven and earth, the words came to her, resonant and disembodied, things of the night's fantasy:

> *"That thou, light-winged dryad of the trees,*
> *In some melodious plot*
> *Of beechen green, and shadows numberless*
> *Singest of summer in full-throated ease."*

She listened. There was a nightingale singing, too, in the copse that hid the churchyard from the great house. How beautiful! Hazel had never heard

poetry uttered before save when it was given out for parsing, and she trembled with the ecstasy of those to whom words are like shells from distant shores, smooth and lovely and full of strange noises garnered from countless ages. She had closed her eyes again, thinking of that poem, over which she had cried in secret and marked whole stanzas with a soft B pencil. The voice had died away in the middle of a line and as Hazel opened her eyes again very quickly, as though to anticipate some unforeseen contingency, she saw the youth advancing toward her, his face rigid with frowning amazement, his eyes in the moonlight darker than ever.

And Hazel, shaking very much indeed on her fence, had one of her intuitions and knew he was coming across the road because he had caught sight of her watching him when he thought he was alone and because he was frightened a little. She caught her lower lip in her teeth as she slipped down and crouched, as tense as a piano wire, until he should speak. The duke had never been like this, so young or so handsome. She murmured, "My goodness!" again as he stopped short on the grass and regarded her with his head on one side and his mouth a little open, a pathetic supplicating expression in his eyes.

"Ah, pardon!" he breathed. "Pardon!" And gazing earnestly at her, he added, "I did not see you. It is late for the young ladies." He looked again. "Ah, you are little. Perhaps you have maybe lost the way. Is it so, little one?"

Hazel, shrinking coyly against her own dear old oak tree, straightened herself. He might be beautiful, but surely he could see she was as tall, or nearly as tall, as he. He came nearer and stood there at a loss as he confronted the bright eyes gleaming behind the convex glasses, the sharp little face thrust forward on a thin white neck to scrutinize himself. How lovely to be called little one! Always it had been "Hazel," short and sharp, or "Ha-zell!" long and imperative, or "Four-eyed scratch cat, Hazel Heath, see if I don't tell your mother when I see her!" long and prophetic of disaster. But "little one!" Hazel felt faint. She had a peculiar notion that he was the young kinsman of her dreams, the suddenly invented creature with whom she had been taunting the duke. Of a sudden she felt faint and afraid. Suppose she really was dreaming? Suppose this were to end with her opening her eyes as Lena's alarm clock went off and she were to see Lena's head appearing through a petticoat as she hurried to go down and put the kettle on! Goodness! Hazel became afraid. She put her hand to her throat, swallowed, and winked to keep the sudden tears in subjection.

"Oh, goodness!" she whimpered. "Who are you? I—I—let me go, please!" She ran past him, and halted at the side of the road. He turned and came after her.

"Pardon, please!" he said in a low earnest tone that benumbed her with its strange and alluring

timbre. "Have I frighten you? That was not my intention, Meess. I go for a walk, and—" he came up to her and smiled bashfully— "and I am a poet, do you know. I think I speak to myself in the moonlight." He laughed and made charming gestures. "Is it not beautiful, the moonlight? Do you like poetry?"

Hazel looked searchingly into his face, her hands crossed involuntarily upon her breast. Curiosity thrust aside the fear as she gazed at him.

"Who are you?" she breathed mysteriously. "I've never seen anybody like you before." He laughed again. He laughed easily. He was seventeen and imagined he was a poet, and he was about to engage in the most fascinating business a man can find, no matter what his age. He was about to talk about himself to a girl.

"Did not I say a poet?" he smiled. But Hazel frowned. She was assuming command of herself once more.

"But," she objected, "I mean, what name?"

"Ah, of course, I can tell you that. I have the honour to be, Meess, the friend of your countryman who live at the Lodge—you know it?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Hazel. "I thought you were a foreigner. You speak funny. Are you French?"

"I spick fonny?" For a moment the youth lost his composure. Only a moment. His fine eyes, that were dark blue but showed black in the shadowy moonlight, regarded the uplifted face of the girl

with an instant's merciless appraisal. "I beg your pardon, I speak as well as I can," he observed carefully. "I am a Rouennais," he added, and smiled at the moon.

"Oh, are you?" Hazel murmured, looking at him and wondering what he was talking about. "I know that poem you were reciting," she said politely. "It is one of my favourites. Don't you like Keats?"

"I—I adore him!" he exclaimed. "De Musset and Keats! Do you know De Musset, perhaps?"

"I don't know any French poems," said Hazel. "I've done *Zadig*, that's all. You speak dreadfully good English," she conceded. "I think I saw you arrive at the station."

"Yes, I come with my friend Francis Striker."

"Are you a relation of the Strikers?"

"Not very much," he replied, putting his hands in his pockets and leaning against a tree.

"You mean a distant relation?"

"Yes, I think I am distant," he agreed. He pondered while she watched his face. He did not notice that hers was aglow with an astonishing radiance. But a thought struck him. He looked up proudly.

"It is necessary to tell my name," he said. "It is a poor name. I call myself Louis—Louis Chaillu."

"Louis Chaillu, a distant relation," said Hazel to herself as she stood absorbed in the youth's air of romantic hauteur. An aristocrat possibly, she reflected. Certainly a poet. And then a peculiar

thing happened to Hazel. She suddenly became self-conscious and convinced she was only an ugly little girl. That exquisitely balanced pride of mind which enabled her to remain above her family and look down upon them collapsed for a moment and she turned away biting her lips and *daring* the tears to come. That this, which should have happened to Ellaline, should have come to her, silly old four-eyes! Oh!

"An' your name is——?" her companion was saying, inclining his blond head toward hers. Hazel was silent for a moment. She was terribly cross with herself because she could not carry off the situation in a queenly way. She stamped her foot.

"Hazel's my name," she muttered sullenly, looking straight into the magic wood where the chimneys and turrets of Haythorne House were visible.

"Hazel! That is a very pretty name. And you love poetry. Ah! I have a thought!" he exclaimed, so that she turned and looked at him.

"A what?" she asked.

"A thought," he repeated. "It is this. I come out for a walk to find inspiration and I see a dryad of the trees. I am lucky when I come to England. I think this wood is haunted."

"I come here sometimes," Hazel said musingly.

"I have said, it is haunted," he insisted.

Hazel looked at him in stark, naked curiosity. He was something beyond her experience. English boys did not say such things. Hazel had listened

attentively to every word Katie's young man had ever said when she had been with them out courting, and the total result had been just nothing at all for an imaginative child. All his words had been mincing. "Oh, yes! don't you think so? Oh, I do! I think that anthem is simply lahvely." And such like phrases. No nourishment for a growing child at all. She remembered how they had avoided each other's eyes, Katie poking the ground with an umbrella, he with his cane, as though each were an abashed automaton. Goodness! Oh, yes, I say! The vicar said only last week that he *strongly* disapproved! Hazel remembered the barren cackle of them, for ever grimacing, and keeping up a pretence that there were no such things as love and hate, nothing under their clothes save the bones and ligatures and viscera that enabled them to move and utter sounds. She could not express her sense of this; it only voiced itself in her precocious mind as "talky-talky," and she felt an acute sense of discomfort because they never looked in each other's eyes. Even when they sat on the seats under the great oaks near the Orange Tree Inn, or down Friern Lane, and their hands met decorously, elbow to elbow, Hazel could find nothing to feed her imagination. She had read in Tennyson of the spirits rushing together at the meeting of the lips and she had watched Mr. Medlicott kiss Katie. It was evident that the rushing together of their spirits was accomplished without shock.

But Louis Chaillu, standing there in the moon-

light, his hands in his pockets, an avowed poet with a foreign tang to his speech that to Hazel was as seductive as music, was all she had ever dreamed of men. The old poise came back as she stared at him. He had called her secret bower a place haunted by a dryad. How beautiful! She stood up straight, her thumbs linked behind her back. It suddenly occurred to her how she had called him a frog and described him as a bare-legged schoolboy. Goodness! She laughed. He smiled.

"I like you, Hazel," he said slowly. "I will come here many times. Perhaps I will see a dryad when I come." He bent his head toward her.

She heard him in a daze. That aspect of the adventure had not come to her mind. She had preserved the crystalline purity of Ellaline in this enchanted hour. Again! Come again! See him, like Katie and her Mr. Medlicott? She drew a sharp breath and dug her toe into the turf.

"Oh, I couldn't. Mother would be wild."

The bells in the church tower broke suddenly into the seven-tongued chime that announced the passing of another hour. The air trembled, and her voice was drowned in a great flood of triumphant clangour. And in that closely woven fabric of barbaric noises that seemed to surround them with invisible walls, they found themselves standing close together, their hands clutching one another in a high ecstasy of adolescent emotion. She lifted her face and closed her eyes, borne away upon the wings of her

reckless fancy. She was no longer Hazel, but Fair Ellaline. She heard, above the great vibrating notes of the bells, a voice close to her ear, whispering the first and last things of life, the naïve and innocent secrets of youthful passion. The chimes ceased, the deep boom of the hour bell tolled its nine reverberating strokes, and there fell a silence over the woodland.

"I must go home," said Hazel shyly, her eyes averted from her companion's. "I must not see you any more." She began to walk and he kept at her elbow.

"But why?" he murmured. "We must be friends. I will visit your house and we will read Keats and——"

"Oh, *no!*" she exclaimed, and the picture his words evoked, of Fanny and Katie watching them reading Keats, of her father's magnificent condescension, made her feel faint. "You don't understand," she muttered, and hurried on.

"But why, why?" insisted the youth at her elbow. Hazel continued to hurry down the hill.

"Because I'm only just leaving *school!*" she explained with a tremendous accent on the last word, an accent that was, in its way, Hazel's own private criticism of life. That accent meant: "You don't realize that I am only a girl of fifteen, and you'd be a pig if you did, and I am not supposed to have any feelings of my own but you should see my elder sisters, *they* could receive you and talk Keats to you only they don't know anything about poetry except

Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night and the Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold and his cohorts were gleaming with purple and gold, and I wish you'd leave me alone though if you do I'll never speak to you again nice as your eyes are, Louis Chaillu." All this was implied in Hazel's ferocious emphasis of the word school.

Louis Chaillu did not divine this, of course. He only wished she wouldn't go so fast. His English became difficult if he was hurried.

"But if you leave the school?" he suggested.

"Oh, bother!"

Here was another word pregnant with meaning. Hazel had in her mind, as she said it, the very noticeable difference between Number Two Haythorne Terrace and the Lodge. Louis Chaillu might not be a duke but there was almost as much disparity between them as if he were. So she said "Bother!" and left him more puzzled than ever. He kept silent beside her, and as they began to mount the hill toward home the pace slackened and Hazel began to tell him about her family. She conveyed the impression that she was the principal support of a swarm of invalid mental defectives; but Hazel must not be judged too harshly. One's family is the most difficult thing in the world to describe accurately, especially if one is clever and has a sense of humour.

"And you have to work?" murmured Louis, in a tone of rising knight-errantry. "In the kitchen?"

"Often in the evenings," said Hazel.

"A servant!"

"Oh, that's nothing," remarked Hazel airily. "We are very poor people, you know." There was no false humility about this. Hazel had lived all her life in an atmosphere of skilled poverty. With Mr. Heath unable to support his family, it had become an accepted feature of life in West Barnet to regard the Heaths as poor, whom, as Mrs. Giffel put it, we shall have always with us. Hazel had become accustomed to darned and re-darned stockings, to gifts of cast-off clothing. She had been sent to get these things all her life. Her alert mind had absorbed impressions of neighbours in those benign moments when they are most off their guard, and she had gauged with feminine instinct the value of candour. In the England in which Hazel lived, the England of an elderly and solidified Victorian industrialism, success was glorified, but the avenues by which it was obtained were shrouded in a romantic obscurity. Family was more highly esteemed than wealth. You could lose your money, often with phenomenal ease; but you could never be deprived of your family, its traditions and misfortunes. To come of West Country yeoman stock, as Hazel did, for Mrs. Heath was a Parret and claimed kinship with the Somerset Crowthers, was something that stood up like a rock amid the seas of adversity, even if it meant nothing to the grocer and butcher. And it seemed as though this young Louis Chaillu, with his cosmopolitan Norman father and Alsatian

mother, got an inkling of this twist in Hazel's mind, and saw that her poverty was not the permanent penury of the peasant, but merely the straitened circumstances of *petit bourgeois*, or unfortunate gentry.

"Ah!" he breathed. "*La pauvre . . .*" and made a faint unfinished gesture, half benediction and half amorous, about Hazel's shoulders. And Hazel, walking up the hill beneath the shadow of a row of lime trees, was aware of it. She, a girl on the brink of leaving school, one of a tribe of children who had made their parents' lives a desperate adventure in the world, an indistinguishable speck of humanity on a crowded island, was aware of that gesture and seized upon its enormous spiritual significance with a sort of shiver of delight. Suddenly she stopped, and in a low, quick tone, almost peremptory, she muttered:

"Say something to me in French."

For an instant he regarded her with slow wonder, suspecting, as was natural in one of his race, a flash of coquetry from those quick dark eyes. But this was not coquetry. Hazel was off upon one of those journeys of hers into the realms of fancy. She was watching a story unfold, page by page, in her vibrating mind. Her eyes in that pause were closed, but she opened them and turned to her companion to see the smile come to his eyes as he murmured under his breath:

"*Je t'aime, ma petite, je t'aime!*"

"What does it mean?" she whispered. As he bent his head toward her she turned her face to his

with an expression of extraordinary and sombre comprehension. He hesitated even in his Latin ardour at the sight of that austere look. The tenderness of his own smile slowly faded. He was so sensitive to such faint changes in the feminine heart that he could not go on. He looked at her doubtfully.

"Will you promise me something?" she asked in a quiet dead sort of voice, the voice she used to cover emotion.

"Anything, everything!" he said, throwing out his hands in a foreign gesture of surrender.

"Wait here a minute after I go?" she demanded.

"But why? I do not understand——" His voice trailed away in a vague puzzled murmur.

"Will you do what I say?" she asked impatiently. It flashed through her mind as she said this how much she had learned in an hour. She had learned for one thing to look into a young man's eyes and keep her wits. She heard her own voice repeating the words. She heard him reply, not certain of her drift. And then, as in a dream, she saw a girl whom she believed was Ellaline, the faery dream child, put her arms round the youth's neck and kiss him very quickly indeed, and break away and run like a shadow across the fields and into the friendly shadow of Haythorne Terrace. And there was Hazel looking out at her from the wavery looking-glass over the bureau in her bedroom, and Lena, her white arms and bosom bare in the heat of the summer night, sleeping quietly in the corner.

CHAPTER IV

LOUIS CHAILLU, a blond, blue-eyed youth just out of the Lycée, son of a Frenchman exiled by his profession to North Africa, and inheriting conceptions of social orders piled in confusion like a chaos of geological upheavals, came into the Striker home at Haythorne Lodge at a moment when that serene organism was reacting to an unforeseen stimulus. Louis indeed had accompanied the author of this stimulus from France and was intimately acquainted with the peculiar quality of his character. Francis Striker was about a year older than Louis, he had lived in the Chaillu family mansion in the Rue National in Rouen for over a year, and he had returned with a number of ideas not likely to be comprehended by the family at the Lodge.

The Strikers were one of those new-rich families who leave a wide margin between their expenditure and a rapidly increasing fortune. They never mentioned their foreign origin, but on the other hand they never attempted to obscure it. Instead of being nobodies in Belgravia on two thousand pounds a year, they were almost gentry in West Barnet on twelve hundred. Elsa and Lucia, the two girls, were nineteen and twenty, and perfectly bred at the

best school in Brighton. Nicholas and Albert, the latter, so Mrs. Giffel contended, "named after the Memorial," were older—about twenty-five or six and were responsible for the growing income of Striker and Selby. They were spruce, good-looking young business men, with perfectly polished shoes, perfectly glossed top hats, and perfectly rolled umbrellas, and they caught the nine-ten every morning. Other young men might be ill, or even die. They might go by earlier trains or take a day off. But the nine-ten, as it emerged from the Oakleigh Park Tunnel, would find the Striker boys on the platform, and generally the father too, ready to board the aftermost first-class smoking compartment. They got out of the corresponding compartment of the four-ten from Moorgate Street and walked briskly, gold-handled umbrellas or sticks swinging rhythmically, *Evening Standards* under their arms, up the Station Road, along Woodhurst Road, and across the fields to the Lodge. There is nothing significant or sinister about this exemplary regularity of the elder Striker boys save that it was symbolical of their characters and made them the butt of facetious or moody raillery by their younger brother Francis.

For Francis fitted in nowhere in this close-meshed mechanism of bourgeois life. He had left two preparatory schools in a spectacular fashion. Mr. Striker had adopted Spartan methods and installed Francis as an office boy in the family office and ware-

house in Playhouse Yard. He himself had begun at the bottom, so he always said, and the statement was accepted, without criticism, for excellent reasons. But Francis had not been a success as an office boy. It was found that the industry and zeal of the other boys declined with startling rapidity while he was there. Francis was big for his age and naturally athletic. He could walk on his hands, sing comic songs, play the tin whistle, dance hornpipes, and wrestle Cornish fashion; but he seemed congenitally incapable of adding up a line of figures. Nicholas and Albert did not know where to look when Francis rode into Playhouse Yard bareback on a huge dray horse—rode him right up to the office windows and waved his hat at them before slipping off and vanishing with his gigantic mount into the shipping department.

And then, as a characteristic climax, Francis, after a week of sullen quiet that followed a furious wigging by "the Pater," disappeared. Scotland Yard was notified, preparations were made to drag the Thames. Francis was discovered, much to his annoyance, on board a sailing vessel bound for New Zealand. Nicholas and two inspectors rushed on board about half an hour before the ship was due to sail and Francis, rather ridiculous in a jersey and a billycock hat, was hustled into a four-wheeler and convoyed safely back to Playhouse Yard.

At this point Mr. Striker Senior, who suffered more than either Nicholas or Albert from these exploits

of his youngest born, evinced a singular sagacity. Through one of his correspondents, a broad-beamed vintner of Rouen, he arranged that Francis should enter a respectable French home and become immersed in a foreign atmosphere. Monsieur Chaillu, a widower, engaged for long periods on government construction work in Tunisia, whose home was in the austere charge of a maiden sister, consented to receive Francis if his own son Louis, a somewhat bookish youth, were accorded the privilege of a year or more in England. Monsieur Chaillu in fact wrote from Tunis that he proposed to article his son to a firm of civil engineers in London eventually, a firm whose works were more likely to afford a wide all-round training than the French official service.

But Francis, who went to Rouen willingly enough, could not help being a problem for Mademoiselle Chaillu. He grew bigger and bigger, not merely huge of frame and muscular, but fleshy and mountainous. He taught Louis to box and wrestle and knocked him about "*pour le faire dure*" as he told her affably. By some strange kink in his mental makeup, Francis acquired a fluent control over a voluble vocabulary quickly enough. His labours at the Lycée were largely of a sporting character, yet he made considerable headway in unexpected studies like geology and surveying. The reason for this was his solemn and unostentatious affection for Louis. Louis, who, in spite of his De Musset and

Victor Hugo and Keats, was not so nearly a fundamental poet as Francis with his herculean body and simple psychology, was able to enlighten his friend concerning the life followed by men like his own father and which he himself was destined to pursue. Francis was imaginative in his own way. He could never have reached either the wealth or the power of his later years had he not been a dreamer. His fancy was caught by the words of Louis as he described the great irrigation works whereby the desert blossomed like a green garden, the canals joining the oceans and the breakwaters against which the seas broke into spouting arcs of coloured spray. The contrast of this sort of thing with Playhouse Yard, that blind alley of dark and dingy warehouses, the counting house with its high stools and enormous brass-edged ledgers, the sweet cloying aroma of fermented liquors and the reek of stable manure, hardened the youth's decision to abandon trade and go out into the world. But he had the intelligence to perceive how futile it would prove without adequate equipment.

And he had ability. The English public-school system of that day, a system of Latin and Greek and pure mathematics, with Roman History bled white of all human emotions, was not adapted to Francis Striker. The solidity of his character was invisible to his preceptors and his companions, since it lay dormant beneath an assumption of athletic buffoonery. He had accepted, in a kind of tragic mockery,

the estimate of his brothers, conceding their virtues and his own lack of them, in the vending of wines and spirits. Without understanding the emotion, he shrank, not from merchandising, since he became ultimately one of the great merchandisers of the world, but from the environment, the niggling accumulation of profits in a dirty hole in a smoky town. He had great conceptions and inarticulate longings, lying in the deep grass on the hill below the church of Bonsecours and looking along the far-winding waterway that led out to the greatly imagined domains of distant empires.

It was a sombre pleasure to go up there in summer weather with Louis and hear him read from his father's letters, epistles tinctured with the acrid humour of an impenitent expatriate and shot through with a certain malicious pleasure in revealing to an idealistic youth the world as beheld by a cultivated sceptic. But it was not the scepticism that appealed to the bulky and sombre Francis lying in the grass with his gaze fixed upon the Seine below. It was rather the glimpses of the world of action, the accounts of native revolts and the means by which "order was restored," the perplexities of executives confronted with quicksands "bottomless and supernaturally voracious," or the other more terrible sands moving before a great wind—a visible pestilence. There were other episodes too, which an English father would have passed over in discreet silence but which Chaillu *père* treated in the light of

instructive warnings or the inevitable misfortunes of a hot country.

"*Humph!*" Francis would grunt thoughtfully, "*ton père, il croît c'est nécessaire, l'amour. Moi, si je visite ces pays, je serais un célibataire.*"

It will be seen that Francis, coming home to Haythorne Lodge after a year in such a milieu was destined to achieve some sort of reputation with the family who awaited him. *They* recalled his expulsions, his exploits as a hoodlum, an overgrown boy, which he had almost forgotten save in a dim impersonal way. He was now eighteen and he faced a certain ordeal, since his father was expecting him to enter Playhouse Yard, that grim region of business with the sinister name, and begin a laborious ascent of the ladder to a partnership. And it was a sense of being decidedly in the way, that first evening after dinner, that sent the romantic Louis out to explore the neighbouring valley across which he had heard the swooning sweetness of an English chime.

What went on in the large solemn *salon* of the Lodge, the *salle-à-manger*, with its long blackish panels and meagre furnishings?—for they merely ate there, and the very knives and forks went away afterward to a cubby-hole downstairs. After dinner, mother and brothers and sisters, as well as the knives and forks, being gone, father and son sat at right angles to each other looking at a decanter of port.

Nicholas Striker had worn Dundreary sidewhiskers

in his earlier days, adornments which were now, in the 'eighties, trimmed down to close and extraordinarily symmetrical white mutton-chops. Impossible to deny the beauty and congruity of such a figure in such a setting. There was a justness of proportion in the handsome frame, the white head set nobly upon broad shoulders, the ruddy features with the pale blue eyes under bushy white brows, that harmonized with the soft gleam of his shirt front, the plain gold studs, the sheen of the mahogany table reflecting the mellow light of the candles in their heavy silver holders. And even the expression on his face was, as it were, an expression of the spirit behind all these selected material garnitures, a spirit of settled and immutable integrity. To the perspicuous observer, Nicholas Striker was by no means merely an importer and vendor of liquors. He might easily be conceived as a symbol of his race, of the men who bought and sold with the dignity of kings and devoted their profits to an ideal blend of comfort and beauty and security. To him the sacredness of the house of Striker and Selby was no more a theme for ridicule than the ancient ritual of the Woolcombers Company, to which he belonged, and with whom he joined in procession once a year through St. Mary Axe to a tiny chapel behind Great St. Helen's. Each of these merchants, freemen of the City, carried a small bunch of daisies in his hand, and passers-by in the busy streets would pause and smile. But to Mr. Striker and his com-

panions there was nothing to cause a smile. The Woolcombers had done this for eight hundred years. And there was a hint of this immemorial tradition in his pose as he sat with his youngest son that summer evening and drew the decanter of port toward him. As though the Strikers had done this for eight hundred years. Here or—elsewhere.

"There can be no compulsion," he remarked with candour and dignity, "but there should be no need for it. You are not a boy any longer, Francis."

To Francis, slightly hunched in his chair, and disregarding the glass before him, for he disliked wine, this came as no news. One of the shadows over his life since reaching a comprehension of things was this knowledge of his ultimate independence. A bright shadow if you like, but a shadow none the less, since it affected the attitude of brothers and sisters and set him apart in the family—a black sheep who, by the irrevocable decree of a rich and peculiar old woman, an aunt now dead, acquired in his manhood a perpetual and unchanging income, a golden fleece. He knew it, and while to a lumbering and warm-hearted youth it made no particular appeal, it inevitably affected his father and himself at such an interview as this.

"Another thing," said Mr. Striker, "you may not think so at present, but three hundred a year is nothing. An existence, that's all, to a young man brought up as you have. As for marrying on it—quite impossible."

"I shall never marry," said Francis, thankful to find something he could comprehend.

"Quite so," agreed Mr. Striker amiably. "I said the same myself until I was twenty."

"I mean it, Pater," insisted Francis.

"Quite so. So did I."

Francis made a movement of resignation.

"Three years in the counting house will be a capital training for you. By that time you'll be your own master and I've no doubt you will see the force of what I say." He raised his glass.

There was a silence for a moment and then Francis, with a visible effort, for he had no great aptitude for speech, began to mumble his desires. They came as a surprise to his father who, immersed in the fortunes of the house, in civic affairs, and the movements of stocks, tended to assume subconsciously that buying and selling were the preoccupation of every intelligent man, and the things bought and sold were the joint production of God and the working classes. As no doubt they were; but Mr. Striker saw very little of the general officers of that great army. He had never employed an architect, for example, for he was a believer in that fine old English doctrine that "fools build houses for wise men to live in."

So he had nothing to say immediately in reply to his son's clumsy allusions to civil engineers. The full significance of such a career was less apparent than the immediate necessity, according to Francis, of going into the same office as Louis.

"At a thumping fat fee, I suppose," Mr. Striker commented, reflecting upon the blond youth who had bowed when his host had at once assured him he'd soon pick up English—it was a very easy language. Mademoiselle Chaillu had had many old-fashioned notions of etiquette, and one on which she insisted most rigidly in bringing up Louis was the rule against exposing a host to contradiction or ridicule. Which reduced Louis automatically to silence until the point when he forgot and spoke fluently to Elsa, who sat next him. Mr. Striker let it pass. So Chaillu *père* was an engineer. But that was a distinguished profession in the government service. Something like our Indian Civil, he supposed.

"Is that what you're after?" he asked Francis, who shook his head.

"No, Pater. Louis's father sent him to England because he thinks private practice is much better."

"Oh! Humph! You seem to have threshed it out pretty thoroughly between you on the way over."

"Before that! Pater!"

"Well?"

"I can't go into Playhouse Yard. I can't really and truly. I'd go off my head in a year."

"Nick and Albert stand it very well."

"Yes, I know, but they *like* it. I loathe it."

"We have to do many things we don't like, or loathe, as you so gracefully put it, Francis."

Mr. Striker was a notable figure as he set down his glass after drinking. He and his ancestors had

been doing and saying this sort of thing for eight hundred years. He did it by instinct, just as he rose when the National Anthem was played or a lady entered the room. A lady entered at this moment. She saw the expression of immemorial sententiousness on her husband's face, and the sprawling figure of her youngest, his head on his hand, staring gloomily at the decanter, as though he were posing for a picture entitled, "The Drunkard." Mrs. Striker, gliding behind her son, put her arms about his rumpled head and touched it slightly with her lips. Mr. Striker had risen and remained standing. He decided at that moment to say no more and go for his smoking cap and jacket.

"Dearest Francis," said Mrs. Striker, gently preventing him from getting up. "The Pater has monopolized you long enough. You really must join us on the terrace. And Mr. Chaillu seems to have vanished."

"Oh, he's a queer juggins, Mater. He detests girls, and he's probably gone off to write verses in the moonlight. He's doing an opera."

"*That* doesn't sound very promising," observed Mr. Striker. "For the future, I mean. Shouldn't imagine poetry 'ud be much of a recommendation in an engineer."

"Well, he'll have heaps of tin, so it doesn't matter," said Francis.

Mr. Striker shook his head. This was not his creed at all. Money was a responsibility, not an excuse for writing poems.

"Well, Mater, I'll come, of course, but I'm jolly tired coming over in that beastly old *Manche*, and I'm just dying to crawl into bed," said Francis, suddenly rising to an alarming height. He stretched, and flung his arms around his mother with loutish good humour.

"Francis, you are positively enormous," said the lady, whose preoccupying consolation was music and especially German opera. She regretted she had not named Francis "Siegfried." Francis, however, was not disposed to regret it. He had punched more than one Norman head for calling him a Saxon pig. Now and again the heaviness and phlegm of the reflective Germanic ancestors seemed to obscure his vigorous English temperament. He grinned in an apologetic fashion. He was not so very much taller than his mother, but he possessed that elusive quality, difficult to define, a large presence. His massive shoulders, his bent head with its scanty, tousled light brown hair, seemed to fill the room and adumbrate power. Contrasted against the dark panels of the chamber, he conveyed to these two people, his parents, by his gruff taciturn speech and his moody air, a stronger perception of his real character than any he could have made with noisy protests.

"Pater wants me to go into the office again," he muttered.

"Well, darling, it will be nice to have you at home."

Francis did not reply. It remained one of the

outstanding indications of his flair for reality that he rarely argued with men and never with women. In after years, and at one special crisis, this brought upon him much harsh opprobrium to add to his other burdens. Yet he would not, or could not, bicker. He had an inarticulate conviction that this business of going into the office was not to be settled by argument in any case. He felt that the ambitions and dreams inspired by his friendship with Louis Chaillu would have taken shape and developed had he never gone to France. He would, he thought in his heart, painfully evoking the vision, go for a soldier or to the Colonies. Yet, to balance those smouldering yet incandescent passions for a career beyond walls, he desired to hold the affection and esteem of his kindred. Stunted neither by lack of money nor the cares and complications of lofty station, rendered suave and frictionless by adequate culture and amiable dispositions, that affection and esteem had become a gracious and integral factor of the Striker ménage. It was their contribution to the age. Francis, aware of its importance, yet incapable of voicing his sense of values, remained silent in the presence of an immense antagonizing desire.

And his parents, who loved him, looked at him as he stood clumsily before them, his head bent, his eyes gazing moodily through the open window at the moonlit fields and woods. Mrs. Striker was mature yet slender, and her large brown eyes, beneath the great pile of coiled hair which made her look like

the pictures of the Princess of Wales, glanced from husband to son with an alert yet disinterested scrutiny. The Strikers did not wrangle. Francis might resist his father's will. The daughters might elope. But they would not be rude. They would even, at times, be direct and original, but never rude.

"We will sleep on it," said Mr. Striker, turning toward the door. He was in need of a smoke.

"All right, Pater, and thank you," mumbled his son. Mrs. Striker put her hand on the boy's arm.

"And Mr. Chaillu?" she said.

"Blest if I know, Mater." He offered his arm and they stepped through the French window upon the terrace.

"I like him, decidedly," said Mrs. Striker. "He has tone, but I think he will be the better for more feminine society."

"Heavens, Mater, he can't bear girls! Simply bolts!"

"Odious! But of course he is a boy yet. And you, Francis? Do you bolt?"

"No, dear Mater. I—I, well, I don't bolt. But of course I shall never marry."

They were walking slowly along the red-tiled terrace behind the house as Francis made this casual remark.

"Dearest Francis, have you the slightest idea what you are talking about? The Selbys dine with us next week."

Francis was not so sure this was changing the sub-

ject. The Selbys had no sons, but they had a daughter almost exactly the same age as himself. And her name was Frances. And Francis, who had called her, to himself and to the servants, "the Selby kid," detested her very heartily. Striker and Selby had been in partnership for two generations, and Selby had no sons. The whole subject was distasteful to Francis. He remained silent until they reached the drawing room, where the open French windows permitted them to hear Elsa playing the piano. Nicholas was turning the music. Albert and Lucia were engaged, at the far end of the great room, at cards.

The pleasure this family derived from their own unbroken circle was a phenomenon of their race and period. They had achieved the ideal which had emerged in England after the Revolution and had become articulate in the Augustan Age. From Anne to Victoria this conception of respectability in good circumstances, this principle of domestic solidarity, had broadened and deepened down to the years preceding the Diamond Jubilee, the apotheosis of that extraordinary sovereign. In them the family tended to be centripetal and static, as compared with the Heaths, who detested and criticized each other dynamically, whose whole tendency, concealed beneath conventions and hampered by poverty, was to be centrifugal, and to be eternally testing their bonds. Mrs. Giffel's sardonic humour, Cicely's hand against all men, even Mrs. Mills's

deep-throated appraisals of social life, and young Smith's perpetual nosing around for a better position, were phases of another England altogether, a yeasty and fermenting mass of struggling organisms, beneath the smooth motionless crust of the Strikers and the Selbys and mighty auriferous boulders like the Haythornes.

"Do they?" muttered Francis at length. "I say, Mater."

"My dearest boy."

"I suppose the Pater's going to be awfully cut up about this."

"About what, Francis?"

"My not caring about Playhouse Yard."

Mrs. Striker did not reply immediately. Although a good many thousands of pounds of her own had gone into Striker and Selby and were earning a very handsome return there, it did not occur to her that she ought to have any voice in the management. Even the two boys, Nicholas and Albert, active participants in the commercial success of the firm, were never consulted as to policy. Striker and Selby sat on boards and recorded their votes with other directors, but there was no board in Striker and Selby's. Private firm. As for Mrs. Striker herself, she was legally classified with infants, criminals, and lunatics, and therefore did not count. Mrs. Striker did not resent this, any more than she resented Mr. Gladstone governing the country without consulting her, and for the same reason. She had

confidence in Mr. Gladstone and also in her husband. But at this moment, walking on the terrace behind the house and looking out upon a garden flooded with moonlight, the note of feeling in her son's voice recalled to her mind an early ambition of her own.

Emily Striker had been born into one of those homes in Onslow Square where economic security was of prime consideration. Nothing short of a world cataclysm could do more than dent the rounded and complete contour of their fortunes. The only defect in so perfect a social system was the excess of leisure provided for their women, who were wealthy enough in their own right to please themselves as to marriage. The men could govern or farm or hunt big game. They could write books or follow the dignified family profession in the Navy. But the women of this family, which was named Haverford-Poole and was patrician without being aristocratic, had not much to do, and Emily, a younger daughter, took up music. She took it up because of a profound and powerful inner need of a window opening upon life. The jargon of "living her own life" or the appeal of "a career" would have meant nothing to her, had they been invented. Miss Emily Haverford-Poole was not likely to undervalue the position of an English gentlewoman. What she sought was a vent for the romantic cravings of her nature. The operas of Richard Wagner gave her exactly that. They became her preoccupation. She fell in love with Nicholas Striker when she met

him in a friend's box at a performance of Tannhaüser. The mingling of sensuous and intellectual stimulation in those works, the colour and magnificence of the staged legends, wrought a change in her that even marriage to an energetic business man could not modify. To his children and to the men he met in the City, Mr. Striker was not romantic. Yet to his wife he was linked with the heroic beings of the Wagnerian Cycle—their courtship and honeymoon had been exalted, for her, to the magnitude and intensity of the music dramas.

Time, of course, bringing the inevitable contact with the monotony of life as contrasted with passion, had thrown Mrs. Striker back upon memory and tender fancies. She had gratified the latter somewhat by naming her daughters after her favourite heroines, and she had, as was mentioned, meditated calling her youngest Siegfried. This was an authentic sentiment, and it was the recollection of it that held her momentarily silent when Francis referred to his father's attitude toward the question of Playhouse Yard.

For her heart was with Francis. It would be the fulfillment of those tender fancies if one of her sons were to go out into the world and accomplish something of a heroic nature. Among her ancestors were a number of those gentlemen who, while they remained unknown to the rabble of their posterity, are enshrined in the archives of their peers—general officers and admirals of the fleet in the great days of

old. Something of this was in Mrs. Striker's mind as she walked with her son on the terrace. The solidification of their fortunes was undoubtedly essential in a materialistic age—yet was it treason to their traditions to hand on something else besides a wine business? She was very vague in her mind as to the exact nature of the exploits Francis could achieve for the glory of his family. England at that time was in the profound hush of peace and prosperity, and the world movements of exploration were changing. She did not know. It was not, indeed, knowledge with her at all, only a feeling in her heart that Francis was right and could be trusted to comprehend the emotion without exhaustive speech.

"I am sure," she remarked at length as they turned, "I am sure you would never do anything to give us reason for regret."

"Oh, Mater!" he burst out in a sort of fierce whisper, and he swung round, towering over her. "You've no idea!—I want to *do* something—not just money, you know—that's all right too—but something—you understand—lots of chances for a fellow—abroad," he mumbled, as though ashamed.

"Do you want to go abroad at once, after living in France a year?" asked Mrs. Striker lightly. "Surely, darling, we have a right to keep you a little while?"

"Of course, Mater. Why, I couldn't do anything for years perhaps. What I mean is, I want the

Pater to *agree*, you see. It isn't," he went on, leaning against a pillar, "as if I wanted to run away and enlist, or—you know how it was, Mater. I was so absolutely dotty about trying to go for a sailor I suppose Pater will never believe I'm any good. What he doesn't *see* is, if I wait till I'm of age it would be too late to be articled. Louis's father says really it is better to go into a works first."

"Why does Mr. Chaillu think that?"

"Oh!" Francis looked down and smiled a little. "He says it's a good place to lose one's illusions about the working classes. That's his way, Mater. He always rags Louis in his letters. But he's a jolly big engineer and he's no fool, I can tell you."

"I see. Well, Francis darling, I love you for being so ambitious. I don't think the Pater is so very much against your going into a profession. He has Striker and Selby very much at heart, of course. But where is Louis? I am almost alarmed. Ah!"

"There he is, Mater! I thought I saw somebody going down the garden. He has been for a walk."

It was indeed Louis Chaillu coming toward them, across the moonlit lawn. His hands were in his pockets and his blond, sensuous face was upraised to the perfumed night. Mother and son regarded him as he sauntered, oblivious of their scrutiny from the terrace.

"Hey, Louis," growled Francis. "*Que faites vous, ce soir?*"

Louis changed his direction and came toward the voice.

"Ah, I see you!" he remarked, ascending the steps from the lawn. There was an inflection in his adolescent voice that brought Mrs. Striker's experienced intelligence to a sudden attention. It was a very brief and subtle intuition that revealed Louis Chaillu's soul to his friend's mother. Subtle and complex. Mrs. Striker was forty-five, and yet the appeal of the youth's blond beauty as he came up to them touched with glamour her perception of his essential sensitiveness to women. She smiled as his face fell slightly when he reached them and recognized her. Yet his eyes sparkled with the happiness of remembered emotions.

"Where've you been, old fellow?" asked Francis.

"Oh," said Louis, "I took a walk. The evening is most beautiful. I heard a nightingale. For a night like this, one must recite Keats, eh?"

Mrs. Striker, one hand on her bosom, her beautiful head a little inclined toward her guest, looked at him with still closer attention. Indeed, it was the first time she had actually beheld him. The arrival of her son had evoked romantic maternal dreams, and the well-bred youth had effaced himself with such delicacy that she had formed merely an agreeable and imaginative conception of his character. Here she saw him, without intervening veils of decorous convention, and she was interested in what she saw, recalling Francis's energetic assertion of his

friend's dislike of girls. Boys were like puppies, she reflected, born blind. Yet, as a mother, that reflection gave her pleasure. She was unable to resist a sigh that Francis could not remain in that condition of naïve obliviousness to the stormy regions of the heart. He was adorable, she thought, suddenly taking his arm and indicating to Louis that he might join them.

"Keats?" she repeated, "and nightingales? You are a poet, Mr. Chaillu."

"Yes, I have thought so often," agreed Louis.

"He is, Mater. Writes no end of bosh," corroborated Francis amiably as he put his other arm over his friend's shoulder.

"But to-night," went on Louis in a precise, far-away voice, "I was sure! I have seen a dryad. I think I was enchanted to-night!"

Mrs. Striker was aware of a novel pang of regret, a kind of volatile essence of jealousy that evaporated upon the instant. She laughed gaily.

"How fortunate!" she remarked. "None of us have ever seen her."

But she hurried on a little and signified, by the faint tremble in her voice as she pronounced the last word, that she did not encourage dryads to any extent. Francis thumped Louis between the shoulders.

"What you want is a jolly good sleep, old juggins," he observed. "Mater, are we excused? You know——"

"My dear boy, of course. Will you show Louis the way? Good night, both of you."

They made their way upstairs to a room overlooking the garden. The windows of the Lodge were diamond-paned. As Louis slowly pushed the casement open, he experienced an extraordinary conviction that he had done the same thing somewhere in the past. "In some other life," he explained to Francis who was yawning prodigiously while he hunted for his toothbrush.

"Is that so?" he remarked ambiguously. "I think a couple of fast rounds with the gloves in the morning, *mon enfant*, will have the same effect. When you find one eye closing up, you'll be certain it happened before. You and your dryads!" And he threw a shoe, catching Louis in the wind as he turned.

"Only one!" he protested. "A lovely, lovely creature of the woods."

"Do you expect me to believe that?" demanded Francis, scrubbing his teeth.

"No," said Louis sulkily. "I cannot believe it myself after you throw a shoe at me!"

Francis chuckled.

"Same old Louis," he said. "I suppose a girl looked at you and you sloped."

"No!" said Louis again. "As it happens, my friend, I did not slope. Did I not say I was *enchanté?*"

Francis came over, grasping Louis by the hair and drew his head back with a jerk. For a moment

he scowled at the upturned face with the blue eyes regarding him obliquely and the broad, sensitive nostrils flaring.

"I believe you are going to play some hanky-panky game with me, Louis. Some *jonglerie*, do you understand? *Enchanté!*"

"Ah! let me go!" said Louis, twisting away, but Francis held him. "It was the moon."

"The moon! Oh, indeed! *La lune?* You mean *l'amour?*"

Louis eyed him in silence.

"Are you going to break your word, Louis?" demanded Francis, letting him go. Louis sat down on the bed.

"No!" he muttered. "No. Only do not be so severe. We have not started yet upon our travels."

"Yes, we have started upon our travels," said Francis. "You swore it, at Bonsecours. Until we are over thirty."

"A long time," commented Louis, running his hand through his blond hair and smiling. He had a very charming smile. Francis glowered and went back to his toothbrush.

"I can see," he said, "I shall have a tough job keeping you up to the mark, Louis."

"Ah, and perhaps yourself also," said Louis reflectively.

"I!" exclaimed Francis, scandalized.

"Exactly," said Louis. "I shall take a look at you, some time, under the moon."

CHAPTER V

WHEN Lena Heath came out to the garden gate, one Sunday morning in August of that year, there was not one single person left in Haythorne Terrace. They were all at church or chapel. Lena was at home cooking the dinner. She had received most careful instructions from Katie and Fanny, some of which she had heeded, and now, about half after eleven, she came out into the cool front garden from the roasting back kitchen (which faced south) to breathe a little before dishing up. Lena occasionally reflected, what an extraordinary quantity of hot food seemed necessary to people on Sunday. Pork! And she couldn't bear to touch it herself. But there she was, damp and pink-faced, resting her strong round arms upon the top rail of the gate and looking placidly across the valley and up the hill toward the trees that hid Haythorne House but allowed the spire of the lovely old church with the perfect chime, that marked the hamlet of Sybil Fosters, to soar against the flawless blue of an English August sky.

It is impossible to assert just what Lena was thinking as she leaned against the gate. It might have been food and what a lot of it the family made away

with. Or school, where she still stuck in the Sixth Standard for the third successive term. Or church, where she seemed to go less and less now Katie and Fanny walked out with young gentlemen who came courting, or perhaps it was nothing in particular, since her main object in standing there was to get cool. Yet Lena was always, even then, a girl who made one wonder what was going on behind those quiet gray eyes and in that austere yet voluptuous bosom.

This morning, while she looked across the fields, she saw a tricycle slowly labouring up the hill. The man who propelled it seemed to have a load on his back, and presently he gave up the unequal struggle and dismounted, pushing the terrible contrivance in front of him. Lena watched him, curious to a certain extent about the thing on his back, which presently was revealed as a knapsack and a collapsible easel such as painters used to carry. She did not know what it was, however, and when he looked in her direction, and instead of continuing on his way over the fields toward the railway came toward her, she imagined he had something to sell, and the words "not to-day thank you" came unbidden to her lips.

But he had nothing to sell. He was a man of thirty; a short moustache gave firmness to his face, and his eyes were attractive. He left his machine on the other side of the road and came over to Lena, raising a straw hat of the type called "leghorn."

"I am making for Totteridge," he said in a pleasant voice. "Can you direct me, by any chance?"

Lena looked at him steadily. Then she raised her left arm in a slow circular gesture until it pointed westward.

"Over the bridge," she said and her arm returned to the gate.

"Thanks, indeed," he replied, wiping his brow, adding, "A very warm day."

"Yes, it's hot," she conceded, looking at the knapsack he had swung to the ground. "Is that heavy?" she asked simply.

"Confoundedly!" he assured her. "I have been sketching in Sybil Fosters and I want to get to Totteridge for lunch."

"That way," said Lena, waving her arm again.

"Thanks," he repeated. "By the way, you would not be offended if I asked you to keep just as you are for a moment?" He began unpacking his gear very rapidly, while Lena remained motionless in sheer astonishment. He unfolded a little camp stool, pulled out the legs of the easel, and in a very few moments had a gray canvas set up and ready.

"Sure you don't mind?" he asked, smiling a little and rather anxious all the same. "Just keep absolutely still." He took a crayon and began to make short jabbing strokes with results she could not see, as the easel was turned away from her. And while he worked he talked.

"Keep your eyes on Sybil Fosters church—that's

right. Never been sketched before? Well, not many artists here I suppose. . . . I don't come this way often, worse luck. . . . Nobody ever tell you how nice you look? Well, they forgot, I expect. Perhaps they aren't very well up in that sort of thing . . . or afraid they'd make you conceited. . . . *I'm* not afraid of that . . . I think a little conceit a good thing, you know. . . . *I'm* conceited, come to that. . . . You know, you are a model now . . . and a good one, let me tell you. . . . There! now you can rest a minute."

Lena did not know what he meant by resting. She remained in her unstudied pose, her arms on the gate, her eyes fixed upon the distant spire. The artist, realizing his opportunity, ceased to talk and went on working very fast, his eyes darting from her to his canvas and back. While this was going on Lena's mind was absorbing and considering the novel fact that she was posing to a real artist, a man who painted pictures, such as she had read about in story books. She had a momentary difficulty in believing that a real artist could possibly come to Haythorne Terrace. Still, it was a pretty place, prettier than Totteridge, Lena believed. And then, what did he mean by her being nice to look at? Lena's gray eyes took on a darker shade as this thought crossed her mind. Not beautiful like Elsa Striker, surely. Lena did not comprehend that the man who was hastily drawing the shape of her head and indicating

in crayon the superb modelling of her neck and arms and bosom, would not have wasted five seconds over Elsa Striker, who was just the same shape and had precisely the same anatomical faults as a hundred thousand other young ladies in London. She did not suspect, either, how very much this brief encounter with a man from an alien world would influence her own future. She suspected nothing; and it was this profound placidity in her pose and expression, this fundamental acceptance of life in her air, that he was so anxious to fix, somehow, in his drawing. Models, this man often said to his friends in Chelsea, were a scourge, because they came of cunning, predatory stock. Their avaricious and restless souls informed and contorted their faces and bodies so that a lay figure had more antique repose and dignity than they. At last he put down his crayon and she turned her head, a faint light of gratification in her face as he held the drawing so that she could see what he had done.

"I really ought to apologize," he muttered, looking keenly at her, "but a chance like this doesn't come my way every day. Sure you don't mind?"

"No," said Lena. "But I must go now. I'm cooking the dinner," she added, her eyes on the ground at his feet.

"My name is Bayliss," he remarked, lifting his hat again, "and I live at Glebe Place, Chelsea. Can you remember that?" He smiled. "Perhaps some day, when you have time, you will come and see the picture when it is finished."

"I'm not likely to have a chance," said Lena. "Have to work," she added for his information.

"Yes? Well, don't forget—Glebe Place, Chelsea. George Bayliss. And thank you for the sitting."

He folded his accoutrements together and fastened them to the knapsack. He lingered after putting his arms through the harness of it.

"You don't know it, of course, but you can pose," he said as though talking to himself. "So few girls can do it. Well—by the way, what shall I call the picture?"

"Call it?" she said. "I don't know."

He smiled in his attractive way.

"I would call it by your name," he said. "It is you, you know. I've told you my name. Won't you tell me yours?"

"Lena," she replied, moving away from the gate.

"Thanks very much, Lena," he called. "Don't forget if you ever want to see it. Glebe Place. Good-bye, Lena." He waved his hand as he climbed on to the tricycle and began to treadle.

Lena went into the house and set to work to dish up the potatoes and greens for dinner. As she held the saucepan upside down over the sink, and shook it vigorously to make the potatoes floury, she put into the action a certain degree of nervous excitement. That was always Lena's way. When anything bothered her, either pleasantly or otherwise, she let off steam by doing something with unobtrusive energy. When the potatoes were in the dish, she

paused, her finger on her chin, her eyes on the garden through the open window. And she smiled to herself.

It struck her as humorous that any one could expect her to go to Chelsea. Why, she had never been farther than the Tottenham Court Road in her life. She had no idea of where Chelsea was, come to that. She liked the sound of the name. And the memory of Mr. Bayliss sitting suddenly down in the road and making a picture of her was delightful. And why did he do it? What was there about her that made him so anxious to get her portrait?

When anything happened to Lena, it was like a stone dropped into a very deep pool. There was a light splash, the surface immediately became smooth again, and nobody, unless they saw it, would ever know that anything had fallen in. She had one of those rare minds that are insensible to the glamour of speech. They are incorruptible entities, dwelling in shy yet beneficent seclusion in the soundless recesses of crystal caverns. The value of this extraordinary incident in Lena's life had to be discovered in something more profound than the excitement of talking of it, for she was never known to utter a word upon the subject. She did not forget it, however. On the contrary she turned it over and over again in her mind that afternoon when the family, surfeited with pork and apple sauce and the floury potatoes and damson tart, became the victims of Sunday afternoon inertia. How nicely he

had spoken to her! she reflected, recalling the clean lines of his nose and chin, the broad even teeth when he smiled, the veins and tendons of his hand as he worked. And his eyes—cool and appraising, yet pure. She found, on considering the matter, that he inspired in her no fear such as she ought to experience in the presence of a stranger who stared at her and asked her what her name was. He had the eye of a man who had come through the trouble and difficulties of youth and who saw beyond the veil of the flesh. She did not build around his memory a fantastic romance, but she experienced a warm conviction that he was honest and would not tell lies. Lena set an obscure but emphatic value upon this quality. One of her favourite expressions was, when told of something hard to believe, the single word "Straight?" You were supposed to answer, too.

Lena went slowly up to the room she shared with Hazel. They got on very much better than might have been suspected from their diverse temperaments—possibly because of them. Hazel never ejaculated "Straight?" To Hazel your truth and your lies were all equally seductive contributions to an imagination like a casket lined with mirrors. If Lena's character was a placid and unplumbed pool, Hazel's was a river flowing through an enchanted country, with strange cities and mysterious forests on either hand, where the inhabitants met with fabulous adventures. Lena was aware of this differ-

ence, but it presented itself to her in a simpler form. Hazel was clever, while she herself was slow. Clever or slow, however, it transpired, as she sat on the edge of Hazel's bed, where Hazel herself was lying and reading "Stepping Heavenward," that the next step heavenward was to take the children to Sunday school. Mrs. Heath, from the parlour sofa, could be heard languidly uttering a warning to that effect.

"Yes, Mother," said Lena, distinctly. Hazel made a face at the page she was reading. Hazel had a special mind for Sunday afternoons. It was not a lazy or a naughty mind, but it did require quiet to flower and bear fruit. On Sunday afternoon Hazel laid aside the romantic rôle of Ellaline, the Kapellmeister's lovely daughter, and assumed the lowly guise of a changeling. It seems that, unknown to the remainder of living humanity, Hazel, while an infant, had been surreptitiously substituted in the cradle, and her real parents were of royal blood. For political reasons it was impossible for them to seek her out and atone for the long years of obscure poverty. There had been many solutions of this tragic state of affairs, but the most recent, which had occurred to her this very afternoon, was that on her eighteenth birthday, although betrothed to a rising barrister, Hazel would take the veil and become lost to the vile world. The very night before the convent doors were to clang behind her, the rising barrister would receive a mysterious brief

from secret clients, persons of vast wealth and formidable connections, and in the course of his learned researches he would discover that his fiancée is the Grand Duchess of——

This was the point Hazel had reached when the question of Sunday school arose. It was never decided what particular duchy of Central Europe she was destined to render illustrious by her wit and beauty. She allowed "Stepping Heavenward" to slip from her hands and abandoned her history of the romantic foundling. In later years, Hazel was often alluded to by intellectual critics as "illiterate." And this was true in the sense that what she read rarely entered her mind, and when it did, she soon forgot it. Hazel used reading as a medium for apprehending her own imagination. A certain parallel might be drawn between her and Francis Striker, who derived the same profit from hearing others talk. Francis was never known to read a book save as a means of gaining knowledge. He never became aware of the existence of romantic stories. Hazel never became fully conscious of anything else.

So at this point, Sunday school immediately before her, Hazel's thoughts turned to the book she would get from the library. It was an excellent feature of the Sunday schools of those days to reward the neophytes for their fidelity by lending them story books to read during the week. Hazel had read almost all the books in the Wesleyan Sunday-school

library, because she had as many books a week as she had sisters who could read. Katie might get "The Young Pilgrim," by A. L. O. E., and Lena, Bunyan's "Holy War," while Fanny brought home one of the masterpieces of the Reverend J. Jackson Wray; but Hazel had read all three before Wednesday evening, besides her own "Adventures of a Three-Guinea Watch." This last book had annoyed Hazel. She always detested stories where inanimate things or dumb animals were endowed with speech. Something in her character as an artist made the device abhorrent to her. She hated it.

Hazel was full of hates at this time. Since that night when she encountered Louis Chaillu, an experience which had not been repeated, she was become extraordinarily critical of everything and everybody. She was too young to understand that, just as Lena was eventually to enclose an inarticulate passion for beauty in a harsh and rude exterior manner, so she herself was destined to reach a magnificent intuition for sentiment through an exasperating attitude of superiority. She was becoming very "trying" as the phrase went. She had got herself into a blazing row with the whole family the day before when she slapped Septima and made her scream beyond endurance. It was while pacifying the baby that Mrs. Heath, looking steadily at her third child, remarked:

"I must see Mrs. Salisbury. That's what I must do. She spoke to me only last Monday."

This cryptic utterance had reduced Hazel to a sudden and complete silence. There were few things in her life of which Hazel disapproved so much as the scheme embodied in Mrs. Salisbury. Mrs. Salisbury stood for fact, as opposed to Ellaline, the Kapellmeister's daughter, and Louis Chaillu, who were the presiding spirits of the lovely world of fancy. Hazel always shrank from dwelling upon Mrs. Salisbury, wistfully nursing the smallest possible hope that she might die or that the shop might burn down. She was so earnest about this that it hampered her imagination and made her cruel to Mrs. Salisbury without meaning it. She could easily have put that lady into a lunatic asylum (one of the largest in England was only a mile away from the shop) or had her inherit a fortune from a distant and forgotten relative who had died in Australia after discovering a gold mine. But Hazel was too distrustful of the subject to invent a pleasant fate for Mrs. Salisbury. To her it was a fine example of the wickedness of destiny, that she, shining creature that she was, should be destined to be a draper's apprentice. And a little one-horse shop in the High Road too, instead of going up to one of the fashionable places in Tottenham Court Road, or Regent Street, which would mean travelling by train and seeing life. There was an added terror to Mrs. Salisbury's in that Hazel would begin her career by serving everybody she *knew*. It would be, she felt, like being skinned alive. Perhaps this impending misfortune

augmented her trying qualities. The upset of the previous day had brought home to her the grim conviction that Mrs. Salisbury had been there all the time, and all her airy nonchalance and graceful avoidance of the subject had been so much folly.

Sunday school was a refuge from these gloomy thoughts that hung about the back of her mind. She would change "The Adventures of a Three-Guinea Watch" for "Little Women." Hazel felt in need of nourishing her spirit against the coming misery of Mrs. Salisbury's establishment.

Hazel and Lena were both in Miss Culvert's class. In the small iron building the pews were light and movable, and those on the aisles were turned round and arranged to form pens, with a chair for the teacher. Mr. Sanders, the superintendent, after opening with hymn and prayer and making the announcements in his slow, rich voice, would descend from the pulpit and move deliberately about the place, sitting down near a class and listening to the teacher's efforts to interest and instruct the restless little humans ranged in front. This was a severe test for the teacher, for he, or she, could not see Mr. Sanders, while the children could, and their eyes were for ever shifting from the teacher's face to his. But Miss Culvert was let alone. She had the big girls' class away in the upper right-hand corner, and spiritually she was several stages more exalted than Mr. Sanders would ever be. The other teachers considered this favouritism, and in addition believed

Miss Culvert would not have been half so sainted if she'd had young Tom Pepper for instance, or Wally Pickard to handle. They were wrong. Even Tom Pepper, truculent and unabashed, strong as a young mustang and about as cultivated, went down before Miss Culvert's sanctity, because it was real. If the truth were known Miss Culvert had more difficulty in keeping her thoughts on what she was doing when Lena was there than she would ever have experienced with Tom Pepper. Lena disturbed something very far down in Miss Culvert's heart. She sat there, in her thin white blouse with the short sleeves made incongruous by the magnificently modelled arms ending in cheap black gloves holding the Bible, her gray eyes under the wide-brimmed straw hat fixed on her teacher with steady, uncritical attention. She was entirely unconscious of Miss Culvert's feelings. It may be doubted whether Lena ever thought of Miss Culvert as a being with feelings inside her. Her teacher inspired her with awe, as though she were an angelic person, and in the Wesleyan Connexion an angel was an abstraction. That described Miss Culvert admirably, and it was fortified by the clear, almost transparent pallor of her thin wiry face with the hair drawn down austerely on either side, the neutral bonnet with the huge satin bow under the sharp chin, the exquisite purity of the handkerchief she drew from her pocket as she said, "And now——" That meant a bad time for some of the girls, that "And now——" They had

to bear witness. It was no good trying to merge yourself into the general mob of the class. When it came your turn you had to say right out what Jesus had done for you and what you had done for Jesus. The Saviour was anything but an abstraction to the girls in Miss Culvert's class. If Mrs. Mills tended to regard Him as a distant but distinguished relative, Miss Culvert lived almost every moment at his side. Almost! This August afternoon, when she saw Hazel and Lena, after distributing Dora, Margaret, and Septima among the junior classes, come up and seat themselves near her, she was aware of that secular and powerful emotion. She was too experienced a Christian to assume that such an attraction for a simple and beautiful character like Lena's was a sin, but she was troubled because she found it difficult to be at ease in the girl's presence and to pursue with her customary spirit the theme of the lesson. She had meditated of late a daring scheme, which was to propose to Mrs. Heath to take one of the girls to live with her as a companion. If the mother consented, it was Miss Culvert's intention to suggest Lena. Miss Culvert realized she ought to have someone in the house with her now she was past forty, and the notion of forming a girl's character and cultivating her spiritual nature was an alluring one.

She had made no proposals as yet. Such a change in her life would have to be very thoroughly examined while on her knees. It was precisely because, when

on those knees, she became conscious of the secular origins of her desire that Miss Culvert hesitated. She prayed for help daily.

The lesson Miss Culvert had selected for this afternoon was taken from St. Paul. The Epistles were an endless mystery and pleasure to her. Miss Culvert had reached that period in the Christian life when, without having lost her reverence for the sacred volume, she was become so familiar with both Old and New Testaments—the novelty, as it were, of the Creation and Jewish History—that even the sharp outlines of the Gospels and of Revelation had been toned down by interminable perusals. But not so St. Paul. That astute and nimble-witted dialectician was a source of endlessly fresh flashes of revelation upon the complexities of the spiritual life to a mind like Miss Culvert's, so familiar with his myriad allusions to the text that she never needed a concordance. She derived the same esoteric pleasure from the Epistles that an accomplished mathematician discovers in following out in his mind the intricate and interminable procession of problems in pure mathematics. Miss Culvert was a very ignorant woman, compared with the young ladies who were coming down from Newnham with wranglerships, and who were reading "Robert Elsmere," but she was able to dispense with their smatterings of science and logic because of her complete and supple command of the Bible. Even her sketchy knowledge of her own mind was balanced by her

familiarity with the minds of Paul and Timothy and James. Nothing had ever happened to her that was not to be found somewhere in the Book.

"Hazel, will you read the text?" said Miss Culvert after an unusually long pause, while the class shuffled and she herself contemplated the open book on her knee, and she added: "Corinthians. Fourth chapter and the twentieth verse. Now, please."

Hazel turned hurriedly to the place. She realized that she had been hoping Miss Culvert would ask her to read the text. It was a distinction and a sign that one was in good favour. And Hazel was in need of some such sign. Behind all her precocious and keen-witted assurance Hazel had the spirit of a fluttering bird. A mere glance of a cold eye in her direction was sufficient to depress her in her own estimation. At this moment, since she had a vague and only half-comprehended belief in omens, she was anxious to be singled out for this duty of reading the text. Had she been overlooked she would have gone even lower in her own estimation. Her mother's disapproval, Septima's hiccoughs after her sobs had subsided, which were very reproachful to the person who had been cruel to Septima, Fanny's and Katie's anxiety not to notice Hazel's existence, even her father's obliviousness to the whole sad affair which seemed destined to end in Mrs. Salisbury's shop—all these things were in need, somehow, of something to balance them if Hazel was not to go under and become unutterably wretched. She was never able

to rid herself of this superstition. On the contary, she sought for signs that her fortune was waxing or waning. It made no ultimate difference to her achievements, of course, but it clouded her days long after she was grown up and experiencing success.

"For the Kingdom of God is not in word, but in power."

Miss Culvert became very animated and leaned forward in her eagerness to tell the girls what she had evolved out of this text during the past week. In the first place, she said, what exactly did St. Paul mean by those few and simple words? Not in word, but in power! Well, wasn't it that the power was distinct from the word, that the word of itself had no power but had to be inspired by the spirit?

Miss Culvert soon got into her stride and the girls, most of them the daughters of struggling tradesmen who were making a bare living competing with the powerful stores whose branches were just beginning to come out to Barnet, sat and listened. Hazel sat in a sort of agreeable trance. The power of the word, the power residing in the word yet coming from a higher source, as the power a mill pond derives from the swift mountain stream (so Miss Culvert said) fascinated Hazel, for her whole soul was in words and the power of them. She saw the swift mountain stream tumbling down among dark terrible rocks, the green ferns all aglisten with spray. She stirred in her seat unconsciously as the picture came to her mind. She ignored even Lena's casual glance of

enquiry, a glance that in the Heath family expressed a mild wonder at what was making Hazel fidget now. Her foot kicked softly at the rail under the pew—tack, tack, tack. Lena looked again. Beattie Sanders, who was seventeen and soon to take the infants' class, gave Hazel a look of mild reproof. And then Miss Culvert, without interrupting the eager torrent of words, made a quick turn of the head toward that restless foot that was going tack, tack, tack; then another look, a little longer. Lena gave Hazel a nudge with her elbow, and Hazel suddenly awoke to reality. Miss Culvert raced on with the lesson until the words, "And now I want Hazel Heath—" and she gave Hazel her brilliant spiritual smile as she drew out the inevitable beautifully laundered cambric handkerchief— "to give us her own helpful thought for us to remember through the coming week, to bring us nearer to the Kingdom—not in word but in power. Now, Hazel dear——"

This custom of Miss Culvert's had induced in the class a certain stereotyped form of answer which they had discovered, with the cunning and versatility of adolescence, to meet with her mild approval and head her off from the holy secrets of their hearts, which they suspected she was always endeavouring to surprise. As an example Beattie Sanders, who was an apt communicant, would murmur "This lesson teaches us we must try and remember how important it is to have power besides words in the Kingdom of God. Words may have no meaning if

we have no power and——" Beattie would hesitate here, looking down modestly at the toe of her little shoe, while the rest of the class sat silent, very thankful they hadn't got to do it. And Miss Culvert, eager to help, would put her snowy cambric away in a pocket of her shining silk skirt and burst out with:

"Yes! And never forget, dear girls, the power of prayer. Prayer without one uttered word! Just a cry uttered in our hearts that goes straight up to the Throne and brings us the power to struggle on toward the Kingdom!"

That was the usual procedure more or less, and Beattie, or some other charming creature, would heave a sigh of relief. But to-day there was something the matter with Hazel. She was aware of what she had so often called "spazzums in her mind." She was conscious of a novel and terrifying resentment against Lena, who was nudging her again. It was almost as though Hazel were going through the pangs of spiritual parturition from the hitherto homogeneous body of her family. It was almost as though she were actually struggling to free herself from those invisible and tenuous yet formidable cords that hold us back from the freedom and perils of a secular existence. She trembled as she raised her gray eyes to Miss Culvert's ecstatic face and began to murmur rapidly what had come to her at that moment.

"The Kingdom of words!" she said and paused,

all of the girls beginning to stare. Miss Culvert waited with friendly patience. Then, as Hazel still seemed to hesitate, she said gently:

"The Kingdom of God, dear. Go on."

"I mean Kingdom of words!" exclaimed the girl. "Words have power. Words have——" She seemed to stumble in her mind, her gaze going off to the texts beneath the coloured angels holding scrolls in the panels of the varnished pine pulpit behind Miss Culvert's chair. "The greatest power," she announced calmly, as though in a trance. "Words sound like the wind—loud like the sea. Shells——" she muttered in a sort of vague distress. "Shells with sounds in them. Sounds of long ago. I can hear them," she concluded lamely, and putting her hands to her face, Hazel shuddered slightly and waited to be sent home.

There was an agonizing silence for a moment. It was, in fact, full of the agony that assails the English when one of their number makes a break in company. But Miss Culvert did not make a scene. She saw the shudder and the gesture of resignation. She was familiar with many phases of exaltation. Sometimes, in her chamber, Miss Culvert had been so close to her Lord that she had seen strange transfigurations of shadows, inexplicable rays of light on the curtains. She had heard celestial voices in the night. And so she recognized that Hazel was in an exalted mood and was not quite coherent. Something must have upset her. She ran her bright,

eager eye round the class and brought the attention back to herself.

"Let us pray," she said, just forming the words with her lips and closing her eyes. All followed her example, leaving Hazel alone. Miss Culvert besought their Heavenly Father, who was their strength and power, to be a lamp to their path. Let them be able to say, when the time of their departure was at hand, that they had fought a good fight and finished their course, and had kept the faith. And there would be laid up for each of them a crown of righteousness as unto all them that love His appearing. For His sake, amen.

Already the younger classes were moving into the aisles while the librarian was busy handing out the volumes approved by the Religious Tract Society. Lena rose abruptly and made her way down to gather in the three children. Hazel followed with her library book.

"Can I have 'Little Women,' please, Mr. Boldby?"

"It's out, Hazel. Anything else you want?"

"I don't know. Let me see. Oh, there's 'The Man of the Family.' I've read that," said Hazel, glancing along the shabby rows of books.

"Yes, you've read nearly all of 'em, Hazel. Wonderful memory you must have if you remember it all, I say." Mr. Boldby did not read to an intemperate extent himself, but he was a noticing man and he also enjoyed keeping the library records in what he called apple-pie order. It was his con-

tribution to the religious life of his community, for he had no gift for either exhortation or the choir.

"Well, what is it to be?" he asked, screwing up his eyes behind his glasses.

"I'll—I'll take 'Left with a Trust,' please, Mr. Boldby."

"But Hazel, you've had it three times a'ready, to *my* knowledge," protested Mr. Boldby, as though Hazel had been in through the window at night and taken it many times without his knowledge.

"Yes, I like it," said Hazel simply, as he handed it to her after some careful rubber stamping on the inside of the back cover.

"Well, it passes me," said Mr. Boldby in a tone of tolerant wonder. "I sh'd think you'd have it by heart, almost."

Which was nearly the truth. Hazel was very fond of this tale of a family whose father went away to South America for a whole year and left them to be good children and carry out his wishes. But Hazel had an ulterior motive in reading it over and over. She found the book inspired her. She was always thinking, while reading about the boys and girls of the family getting into trouble and out of it, always worrying about their father's wishes and what he would say when he came back. And what she was thinking was this, that when he did come back from South America nobody asked him what he'd been doing there or whether he had behaved himself properly while associating with the South Americans

or whether the South Americans were sorry he had come back. He just arrived and assumed the position of a kind and omnipotent magistrate. Hazel let her imagination wander to South America and tried to visualize him out there on the pampas or living in a contrivance that one of her books called an adobe house, which Hazel mispronounced all her life.

"Oh, do come on," said Lena. Hazel was creeping slowly along, reading the first chapter afresh. Books irritated Lena when absorbed in this way. A little bit of the adult Lena came out now.

"I don't think you ought to have cheeked Miss Culvert," she remarked, shepherding Dora across the road toward home.

"I didn't," said Hazel. "I only said——" Hazel paused, not so sure of the thing she had said. Where was that mood now? Here was Lena resuming the old familiar strain. Hazel flung away. Lena was never very talkative, but she was always right, from a family point of view, and this gave the impression of her being right in all the innumerable cases in which she was silent or simply unaware.

"Yes, you did," said Lena.

"Oh, what do you know about it?" snapped Hazel as they crossed the green behind the high wall and lofty windows of the Strikers' house. It was characteristic of Lena to assume the position of elder sister to Hazel, who was a year her senior. Lena fixed her eyes steadily and sternly upon her sister's averted face. This was not a sign of anger. The

fact is, Lena often conveyed an impression of being callous, or cool, or even cruel and courageous, when her manner arose from her not seeing very well. It was not the custom of those days to drag children to oculists, and it was figured that if three girls out of seven wore glasses, as did Katie and Fanny and Hazel, that was enough in the family! And Lena's poor vision was not yet noticed since she herself was unaware of its subnormal power. She was very sensitive to colour and form and never failed to match a shade correctly in daylight, and Mrs. Heath did not know of any other kind of eye trouble. Lena looked carefully at Hazel's face to see why she was behaving so strangely.

"What do I know about what?" said Lena.

Hazel glanced with an air of reminiscent pleasure at the windows of the Lodge shining in the afternoon sun.

"Why, about anything," she snapped again. In the jargon of sisterhood this meant, "about life, about religion, about romantic attachments, about me!"

Lena declined her eyes upon the grass. Even in her girlhood she so shrank from emotional allusions that her character assumed at times a morose and sullen tinge at their approach.

"Oh, I don't know," she muttered after a moment's laboured reflection.

"You think you know everything, cleverdick Lena," said Hazel, furiously striving to regain

her position as elder sister. "I could tell you a thing or two that would make you stare. Yes, I could! And others besides you. A lot you know about me, Lena Heath. I don't know anything about you though, do I?" Hazel was walking a couple of yards from her sister now, a hard rapture shining in her gray eyes, her chin in the air, her glance provocatively oblique.

"Don't you?" said Lena, digging her toe into the turf as she walked.

"No, because there's nothing to know, Lena Heath."

In a kind of vertigo Lena stumbled as her foot caught on a clump of coarse grass. She saw in complete detail that scene of the morning, the fine clear face of the artist with his eyes regarding her, cool and appraising, yet pure—the finished and competent manner of the man; his courtesy to her, all hot from the kitchen. She heard his humorous, clear voice, talking to her as if she were an equal. She recovered herself and walked on.

"Oh, I don't know," she repeated dully. "I don't know."

Hazel gave a triumphant titter, her eye flickering toward the patrician house with its white and green awnings flecking the ruddy brick walls. Suddenly a tennis ball flew over and bounded away past the little procession. Septima began to trot after it. A young man's voice exclaimed, "I say!" a pair of hands grasped the high oak fence, and Louis Chaillu's

head shot into view. He was extraordinarily handsome just then, his fair hair moist with exertion, his tennis shirt open at the neck, his cheeks flushed, and his sensuous and expressive lips parted.

"'Ullo, 'ullo!" he called, delightedly.

"My goodness!" said Hazel, turning away with a gesture of phenomenal coyness.

"I say, Hazel, will you give me my ball, if you please?" he asked, sitting on the fence. "Eh?" he said to someone down in the garden. "Yes, I have it in a minute. Hazel!" he called again.

"Oh, my goodness!" repeated Hazel, sidling away and not daring to look at him. Septima came trotting up with the ball.

"Give it to him," said Lena curtly, staring at Hazel. Hazel kept her head turned away, an expression on her face that Lena had never seen before. The corners of her mouth were drawn down, her chin was pressed against her breast and her eyes were round as she gave a whinnying sound.

"Here's your ball," said Lena and flung it over to him. He caught it deftly and bowed politely.

"Thanks!" he exclaimed. "Good-bye, Hazel, for the present." And he jumped down out of sight.

Lena said nothing as they wended homeward. She understood now the cause of Hazel's peculiar behaviour.

CHAPTER VI

THE elder Chaillu would have smiled if he had been able to look in upon the firm he had selected to train his son. He would have been none the less impressed. It presented an outward resemblance to the embassy of some obscure but aristocratic principality. Indeed, consulates and ministries clustered thickly about that part of London. They occupied noble first floors in Victoria Street and were to be found in amazingly small and antique quarters in Tothill Street, Queen Anne's Gate, and even behind the cream-painted walls of Dartmouth Street, that delectable little passage that leads from Tothill Street to Storey's Gate. They crowded into these old and often inconvenient houses because of the low rents, yet they achieved a sort of corporate distinction, an air of quality and austere remoteness from the racket of the commercial life east of Trafalgar Square.

The office of Perkins, Perkins and Partners was lodged in one of those enormous houses in Victoria Street which were built originally for families twelve feet high and with cyclopean fortunes, and which eventually degenerated into apartments and suites of official chambers. The ground floor of this particu-

lar house was devoted to a number of consulates, ministries, and plenipotentiaries, chief of which was the Commissioner of Works for the Republic of Costaragua in Central America, a fact that has considerable bearing upon the destinies of the two young men who had recently taken up their duties in the office, upstairs at the rear, of Perkins, Perkins and Partners.

Chaillu *père* would have smiled. All the Perkinses were dead or retired to country mansions, and the firm of civil engineers was no longer of the standing it possessed when Perkins senior had worked with Chaillu *père* in surveying for the great breakwater at Oran. Perkins Senior had been the brains of the business in the sense that he was for ever securing imposing commissions and appointments to consult on boards populous with eminent names. The details he left to his juniors. Very few actual contracts emerged from these confabulations and there was nothing to show save the three or four hundred guineas awarded as consulting fees. When Farquharson became a partner—and he is mentioned because he now reigned in lonely executive grandeur—the firm became less distinguished but began to make money. Perkins Senior was welcome to his C. I. E. and his C. M. G. and his other alphabetical decorations. Farquharson got the contract for a street-car line in China, a reservoir in Morocco, and later a series of irrigation canals in western Egypt. All these affairs were obscure and straightforward

jobs of work, and for that reason the consulting engineer's commission, being a simple three per cent. on the amount of the contract, was nearly all velvet. Farquharson himself had used that word in the office, having heard it somewhere and become attracted by the vigorous quality of the metaphor. Farquharson was one of those men who come of good families in England and suddenly develop a harsh antipathy to all the traditions of genteel ineptitude. Indeed, he represented the type that founds families, and he would have done that very thing but for a malign fortune that robbed him of a strong and devoted personality soon after their betrothal. This loss, the energetic and capable Farquharson, who had never been a lady's man, accepted as a direct injunction to become once more absorbed in his work. He lived alone, save for a housekeeper, in a fine house he had purchased at Surbiton, and as the years went by became an institution known as old Mr. Farquharson. He became mellowed and fussy, collected a house full of books and antique furniture, stood on the side lines on Saturday afternoons, safe from the damp grass on dry gratings, and cheered the local hockey team. He was a tall, lantern-jawed, gray-haired man now, bent and partial to mufflers and spats, a full member of the Institution of Civil Engineers, to which he had contributed absolutely nothing save dues, and he was the sole continuing owner of Perkins, Perkins and Partners.

One other member of the firm, in the sense that he

still maintained business relations after Farquharson had bought him out, was Orlando Perkins, son of Senior, who was in Costaragua, the head of a syndicate whose ostensible concession was a railroad to the capital, but who seemed to be engaged upon many enterprises so far removed from rapid transit as raising tortoises for their shells and a grass (which presumably was being allowed to grow under their feet) whose virtues Orlando Perkins, in his quarterly letters to Farquharson, never tired of praising. Farquharson had never heard of sisal and doubted the virtues, but he read the letters.

Very little of the former hustling and energetic junior partner was visible now in the gray elderly man who sat in the inner room of the office on the first floor back of Number Seventeen B, Victoria Street, S. W. Indeed, very little of anything was visible in there, since the windows were obscured by dirt and a party wall rose sufficiently close to admit but a feeble light. The furnishings partook of the Early Victorian style found in professional offices of that day. Heavy cabinets against the walls were nests of pigeonholes, all papers being folded, and once in a pigeonhole, as good as lost. An enormous copying press, with brazen knobs about three inches in diameter on the end of the cross handle, stood on a small table especially constructed of heavy timber, and immediately in front of the window a large drawing board sloped. There was a safe let into the wall over the mantelpiece, easily

opened with a pipe wrench of moderate size, and in a near-by case with solemn hardwood doors ajar, a number of large account books and bundles of papers in long parchment envelopes. It was not a poor-looking place, but neither was it a comfortable place for a sensitive person. The photograph of a steel dredger-bucket with a patent detachable lip, invented by Mr. Farquharson, did nothing to sustain a visitor, and the perspective of a graving-dock at Singapore, done very neatly by Mr. Swayne when he was younger, was too faded and too strange for an interior decoration.

Mr. Swayne must be mentioned in more detail. Herbert Swayne was Mr. Farquharson's senior assistant. He had been with Perkins, Perkins and Partners a very long time, and actually knew more about the work than his employer nowadays. He was thirty-five and drew five hundred a year, being a fully-qualified civil engineer. The reason why he remained what he himself called "a minion" was simply lack of capital. The idea of asking Farquharson to take him into partnership did not occur to him. He had no money. Nor did the employer, much as he valued Swayne, dream of such a scheme, since Swayne had no money. This is a very important feature of English professional life. Time is money and money buys brains; but brains are not the negotiable equivalent of money. Brains, if you are poor, are simply heavily discounted as salary. Capital lives in another part of town.

Mr. Farquharson was sitting in his private office. Swayne, because he had no capital, was not provided with any more privacy than he could contrive behind a moth-eaten screen in the outer room. His head came very near to Mr. Farquharson's head, although there was a wall between them. So in the wall was a mahogany frame with a sliding shutter. Mr. Farquharson, needing Mr. Swayne, would bend down and drag this shutter open and Swayne, hearing the squeak of the groove, would bend down and look through with an expression of uncapitalized intelligence on his round face. He would answer the question and the slide would shoot back.

If it did nothing else that slide kept Swayne up to the mark. Looked at from Swayne's side, however, it did more. It sharpened his faculties to a preternatural degree. Swayne had trained his hearing so that he knew exactly what was going on in Mr. Farquharson's office. He could anticipate the faint groan of Farquharson's chair as he leaned over to get his letter book on the left or the slightly harsher sound as he leaned to the right to draw the slide. He could detect the soft sound as Farquharson mended a quill pen with his gold and pearl penknife, the flick of his thumbnail against the lid of the huge silver inkstand with the stag's head, of which the antlers were ingeniously used as pen racks. He could inspect a visitor through a hole in his screen as correctly as though he had been present. The whole thing was somewhat of a waste of good de-

tective skill because nothing ever happened of any consequence to Swayne personally, nor was there any need for him to fear Farquharson, who was entirely satisfied with him and never bothered himself about his assistant at all. As far as Farquharson was concerned, Swayne was an organism created and trained to form part of the office staff of Perkins, Perkins and Partners, and what he did with his wages, his time, or his immortal soul was no concern of Farquharson. A fortnight's vacation in July and a ten-pound note at Christmas were Swayne's human contacts with Farquharson. Neither had any desire for closer contact. They were very English. If there was any difference between them, Swayne would have been the more resentful at a breakdown of the icy reserve of their demeanour in the office.

Perched on a stool in the outer office, and facing a ground-glass window opening upon the entrance, was a young man of eighteen. He was the only recent acquisition in the whole office. Years had passed since a new article of furniture had been purchased; Herbert Swayne had passed his days more or less constantly behind his screen for thirteen years. But Mason, this office boy, was new. He had been in his present position a bare eighteen months, and Mr. Farquharson, every time he spoke to him, would look at him as though startled at the sudden sight of a new face.

Such was the *ménage* of Perkins, Perkins and Partners one morning in July of the late 'eighties,

when Francis Striker and Louis Chaillu, with whose destinies this book is concerned, appeared in front of the ground-glass barrier and hesitated in some doubt as they watched the vague outline of Mason's head and shoulders.

Francis knocked.

It was eleven o'clock. Mason had arrived at nine-thirty, Herbert Swayne at ten and Mr. Farquharson at ten-twenty. It was a rule of the office that Swayne's hours were nine-fifteen to five, but as he lived at Croydon with an aunt and knew just what train Mr. Farquharson took, he generally managed to be settled at work some eight minutes before the principal arrived. This was the system in an office, which by reason of its antiquity and prestige, did a professional business averaging a hundred thousand pounds a year.

Georgie Mason, an amorphous high-school boy without either family influence or unusual brains, drew back the ground-glass slide and gazed into the faces of the two new pupils. He knew all about them of course. Mason's duties were not onerous; he read diligently every letter received and as a matter of routine he copied, in the enormous iron and brass press, all the letters sent out. He had announced, about a week before, Mr. Striker Senior when that gentleman had interviewed Mr. Farquharson and handed him a check for five hundred guineas, the fee for articling his son Francis to the profession of civil engineering. It was a transaction that neither

involved Mr. Farquharson in any responsibility nor lingered in his memory. Mason ran to the bank with the check and it was at once forgotten.

Here, however, were two handsome young men, not an old mutton-chop-whiskered johnny with a check book. Mason knew they were to occupy the two desks behind him and he had a pretty good notion that his own freedom of action would be somewhat curtailed once they knew the ropes. The last two had been terrors. Thank goodness they had gone to India to build a reservoir. Mason hoped they would drown themselves in it.

"My name's Striker," said Francis in a quick and succinct tone, very characteristic of the Strikers, but particularly of him. "And this is Chaillu, my friend. Is Mr. Farquharson in?"

Mason slowly slid from his stool and opened the door in the partition.

"Take a seat," he intoned quietly. And he went into the inner office after a respectful knock.

Francis and Louis remained standing, hats, gloves, and sticks in their hands, and looked around. Herbert Swayne, laying out the main drainage system of a small city in French Indo-China, examined them through his secret aperture. He was impressed. Public-school chaps, he reflected. Tone in every line. Morning coats very well cut. Worth while getting on their good books, if they had any sisters. At this moment Mason returned, and holding open the door, asked the two young men to

"Step in, please." They marched in, very self-conscious indeed, and Swayne saw no more. He became aware, instead, of a rumbling growl the other side of his slide. He returned reluctantly to the main drainage system. His acute hearing was not acute enough to hear what Farquharson was saying unless he inserted a penknife in the slide and bent his head. This Swayne would not do. He was too proud. After all it was only a sport, a natural proclivity in a man who had very few pastimes to give his mind relief from his work. It was like his night life—a harmless recreation.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Farquharson said very little that Swayne would have appreciated. He shook hands with his new pupils rather distantly, examined them disdainfully, and asked them to be seated. He then, while changing the position of various papers on his desk, remarked that no doubt they were aware of the difficulties and importance of their profession.

"I would have preferred you to have had a year in some large, engineering works recommended by me," he observed in his dry, harsh voice. "It is an undoubted advantage later on. However—you must take the field work seriously. Mr. Swayne, my assistant"—here he shot back the slide and invited Mr. Swayne to step in, which Mr. Swayne did —"will instruct you in the preliminaries of your work. Mr. Swayne, Mr. Striker, Mr. Chaillu. You will regard these young gentlemen as under

your care, Mr. Swayne. I shall be happy to hear favourable reports of their progress. That's all, I think."

And before they quite realized the fact, Francis and Louis, each of whose parents had put five hundred pounds in Mr. Farquharson's pocket, were outside in the main office and of no more importance to Perkins, Perkins and Partners than Mason, who was paid fifteen shillings a week for sitting on his stool answering calls and posting an enormous day book.

"I think a little tracing——" said Swayne, taking some large drawings of double-elephant size from a drawer. "Just to get your hand in, you know." He looked at the two young men and smiled. Francis hung up his hat and stick and, with an eye on Swayne's shabby alpaca office jacket, peeled off his morning cutaway.

"You'd better get yourselves some overalls like these, you know," said Swayne. He went behind his screen and brought out one of those large pinafore affairs, buttoning at the back, affected by artists and draughtsmen. "Keeps the dust off one's clothes," he added. "Now look here. Do you chaps know anything at all about trigonometry?"

"Yes, we've done all Todhunter," said Francis.

"No, have you? That's simply champion!" said Swayne, smiling broadly. His northern birth became noticeable in his speech when he was pleased and at his ease. "The last chap we had here, you

know—Sefton his name was, public-school chap—knew simply nothing except 'De Bello Gallico' and a couple of plays of Euripides. I had to tell him to get a tutor and cram in the evenings. Of course, his people have money. You fellows are going to take it up seriously, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Francis, putting his hands in his pockets and looking at the floor. "That's what it amounts to. We've been preparing for it at school."

"Well," said Swayne, moving over to the big drawing boards by the window so that Mason could not hear, "the fact is you ought to have gone into an office like Sir Chester Chough's or Sir John Blayne's, if you want to *get on*."

"Can't we get on here?" asked Francis crisply.

"Oh, of course, in a way; but the fees at Blayne's are a thousand guineas, you know."

"What for?" demanded Francis.

"Well, he's doing the Pickham Tunnel, and Chough's pupils are all down in the caissons of the new Rotherhithe Suspension Bridge. Big work."

Swayne looked at both of them and then turned suddenly to the matter in hand as though afraid he had said too much.

As far as Francis Striker was concerned, he had said too much. Francis detested irrelevant gabble. Without being entirely conscious of his own character in this matter, he was forming an adverse opinion

of Swayne as a man. But he listened attentively to Swayne's instructions and fell to work. At one o'clock, when Mason had returned from his bun and milk at a little dairy shop near Victoria Station, Swayne said:

"I'll be very pleased to show you fellows round, if you'll take lunch at my place."

Francis did not particularly wish to go out to lunch with Swayne. He wanted to talk to Louis. But since they were to take orders from Mr. Farquharson's assistant he raised no objections and the three of them, in their cutaway coats and top-hats, marched down Victoria Street to a restaurant facing the station and ate a substantial lunch of soup, joint with vegetables, apple tart, Gruyère cheese, with a tankard of Burton for Swayne and Francis. Louis drank water.

Swayne, after he had recovered from an early stage fright brought on by Francis Striker's steady, critical gaze, began to enjoy himself. He had reached that middle period in life which comes to a man who has mastered his profession, and, debarred from ambition by lack of money, finds time on his hands to look about and take sly peeps at human nature. Swayne "could not afford to marry on a beggarly five hundred a year" he had been known to say. He lived with his aunt at Croydon and, after putting away carefully a small sum in a safe bank, he was accustomed "to go down West" as he called it. Going down West had a singular attraction for

him. He liked the Café Royal and Romano's. He was to be seen at the Continental and the Leicester Lounge, and he knew a small hotel in Rupert Street, very select, where the wine was most excellent and the charges moderate. He pursued this worldly existence at night in obedience to an innocent but powerful imagination. His ideal was grim strength and worldly dominance. He was fond of reading romances in which iron-hard men were worshipped by tender and trembling women. Also he had cultivated a theory that a time would come when he would encounter an opportunity and seize it. General Gordon's career had made a deep impression on Herbert Swayne. And Lord Byron's "Childe Harold" was his favourite poem. Perhaps the most obvious weakness in his character was his preference for the society of those much younger than himself, but it must be confessed he never led them into any mire. It was one thing to sit in the Leicester Lounge for a few hours and feel a gay dog among the experienced courtezans discussing their affairs over crème de menthe and green chartreuse. It was quite another to lead the life of a libertine. Swayne had retained a fundamental innocence of heart that was born of weakness rather than virtue, cowardice rather than courage. But he himself was not aware of it.

He nursed the illusion that so long as old Farquharson was a bachelor, he ought to remain single as well.

He talked, and the two young men listened politely. He told them of the fellows he knew and the club he belonged to but rarely visited—a club in the Strand. He told them of visits he made to artists' studios where a fellow could meet the models. Jolly fine fruit, by Jove! He promised to take them to the Empire and the Alhambra and show them the high life that went on in those temples of the arts. He thought he could arrange a little party to Richmond with three lady friends.

Swayne's chief trouble in life, though he had never discussed the matter honestly even to himself, was an uncertainty of how people of good family really regarded the world and the flesh. He was of low birth, getting a scholarship in a northern school and migrating to London under the impression that it was merely another Stockton or Middlesborough. He was not prepared to deal with the peculiar mentality that well-bred folk reveal the moment they encounter what they call "outsiders." Swayne had had many unpleasant experiences. In the course of time he had lived through them and gained a certain amount of protective colouring. His professional skill and salary helped. But perhaps in his reluctance to marry, in his dalliance with models and young ladies who liked a picnic at Richmond, he was running true to form. He was unable to rid himself of the conviction that the woman he would desire was of finer clay, a more delicate creation than he, and would regard him later with contempt.

And we might even conceive his liking for the society of youths as the result of a ceaseless curiosity about breeding and tone.

Francis Striker interested him strongly. There was, in his opinion, distinct tone in the young man's demeanour, and the first touch of panic on meeting his cool, appraising glance returned at worrying intervals. Striker's poise was "the real thing," the outward expression of an unconscious dignity of spirit. Louis Chaillu eluded him, for that young man was a poet in a kind of waking dream, while Swayne regarded Shakespeare with respect and was fond of saying, "Of course, I never read poetry, never!" Francis was the major character, it was plain to him, and he hesitated a little when his suggestion to have a jolly time at Richmond met with a polite negative.

"You see, we live at Barnet, and my people wouldn't care for us to be away so late. Thanks all the same," said Francis.

Swayne would have liked to ask Louis what he thought, since there was a sparkle in that young gentleman's eye, but Francis added, "The Mater wouldn't care about it." The word "Mater" gave Swayne the necessary hint and he changed the subject. He was acquainted with the lofty ideals of young men just starting, and decided to proceed with more deliberation. The last pupil at the office had been almost illiterate, for he had been at Winchester College, but his tone had been enormous.

His cousins were "honourables," sons of a lord. Swayne had failed to get much out of him save a few hints on hunting and an invitation to a Prince's Gate dinner where he felt horribly out of place.

"Of course, I merely want to show you chaps the ropes," he said.

"Thanks," said Francis.

On their way back to the office occurred an event that was of profound importance in their lives, little as they were aware of it. They were ascending the huge flight of steps to the front entrance of the building, an entrance consisting of successive pairs of high narrow and heavy double doors, when a young man came out suddenly upon the doorstep. He was very short and so dark that he might have pardoned any stranger for imagining him of the Hindoo race. He wore a suit of striped tussore silk, and on his head was an extremely large and costly Panama hat which he immediately removed to reveal a head of such astonishingly metallic lustre that instead of appearing black his hair might be described as raven. It had the sheen of a bird's plumage and hung low over his sallow face with its enormous black eyes.

"Oh," said Mr. Swayne. "How do you do, Mr. Bustillo."

"Nicely, thank you; how's yourself?" said the dark young man with a startling accent. He had first learnt English in the Costaragua Consulate at Sunderland in the north of England.

"Meet Mr. Bustillo, you fellows," said Swayne, and he introduced them. "Mr. Bustillo is secretary to the Commissioner of Works for Costaragua, on our ground floor."

As far as can be ascertained this was the first time either Francis or Louis had heard of Costaragua save as a name on stamps; highly coloured affairs that never seemed to be used on letters but were current only in collectors' albums and described as "Costaragua: five centavos: unused." Had either of them been confronted with the necessity of expressing his conception of Costaragua in so many words he would have had to fall back upon those stamps. A tropical volcanic country where the inhabitants exported postage stamps and rubies, somewhere in South America.

But however elusive and vague their ideas might be, Mr. Bustillo was sufficiently foreign and romantic in appearance to harmonize. They had never seen a Costaraguan, but they were prepared to believe Costaraguans resembled Mr. Bustillo.

That gentleman smiled tolerantly and permitted them to gaze for a moment into the unfathomable depths of his extremely large dark eyes.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance," he remarked as they shook hands. Turning to Mr. Swayne he added in a low despondent tone, "The governor has had bad news. The work has stopped again. The Corcubion River has been in flood and washed out the road-bed for seven miles. It is

heart-breaking. And the men have refused to stay. The fever is bad."

"Dear me!" Swayne looked sympathetically serious. "I suppose that's what made *my* governor so shirty this morning when he came in. Mr. Orlando Perkins would be sure to write him."

"No doubt about that," returned Mr. Bustillo. "Well, don't let me keep you. I'm going up Whitehall. We shall meet again, of course." And inclining his sleek head courteously, Mr. Bustillo descended the steps to the street.

Mr. Swayne was correct in his surmise. Old Mr. Farquharson had received a letter that morning from Costaragua describing the great misfortune brought about by the floods on the Corcubion. In Farquharson's opinion the railway concession itself was a misfortune, and he frequently told Orlando Perkins he would be wise to compound with the government at San Benito over the forfeits and abandon operations. His one-time partner never made any direct response to these urgings, but devoted his letters to lyrical and imaginative (in the virtuous sense) descriptions of the wealth and beauty and potential greatness of Costaragua. He was much more preoccupied with draining the immense area of fever-haunted swamp-land at the mouth of the Corcubion than with getting the railway where the legendary capital of San Benito flourished in a magic climate of eternal spring. Often while reading Orlando's letters, Farquharson, who had travelled

extensively and was not insensible to the emotions that inspired his friend, would become lost in thought endeavouring to visualize the country that had taken so permanent a hold upon the exile's imagination. Farquharson indeed, at the age of fifty-seven, was faintly aware of a change going on in himself. His curiosity, which for a long time had been submerged beneath the practical enjoyment of a profitable profession and a dignified existence, began to emerge. He had reached the point when he played with the idea of paying Costaragua a visit. It was a long journey and not a particularly comfortable one, compared with his annual vacation to the Isle of Wight, but the feeling that his life held another chapter before the end was growing stronger. His idea was that Swayne would keep the office going while he himself was away. That was another new idea. Could Swayne do it? Mr. Farquharson, because of his assistant's general all-round efficiency and long standing, had acquired the impression that Swayne could. It was helped by the supplementary fact that when Swayne was away things got mixed. Because if Swayne couldn't, Farquharson's notion of permitting his executors to sell the practice to Swayne on very accommodating terms would be unwise. Farquharson told himself he ought to take a partner, and immediately rejected the idea. He had not been happy as a partner, and a stranger——no!

He returned to the letter. Orlando Perkins wrote, in his legible yet ornate calligraphy:

Our trouble here, my dear Farquharson, is a dearth of young men. They will not remain in the country. Leaving out of consideration those who fix their eyes upon government sinecures, all our most promising youths strain every nerve to get positions abroad. Nor is this exodus compensated for by the arrival of young Englishmen or indeed the young men of any nation. I foresee the day when we shall fall into the clutches of the nearest pawnbroker who has the perception to comprehend the enormous latent value of the security. I would not blame him, but I must tell you I deplore from the bottom of my heart the blindness of my own countrymen who can sink millions in India and South Africa and remain ignorant of this country.

This extract will reveal to the reader the temperament of Orlando Perkins; but it fails to show his executive ability. Mr. Perkins, the owner of vast herds of cattle which prospered in the lush savannahs of the lower Corcubion, the lord of a magnificent country house on the slopes of Albatorre overlooking the ancient capital city of Ortygia, was no mere rhetorical old fool. He had a passionate love for the land of his adoption, for its language, its climate, and its astonishing beauty. He had married an Alvarado, and his relations with the first families of the capital were of the most amiable description. Yet he never ceased to be English in the best and finest sense of the word, and it was in obedience to sentiments exalted by long absence that he wrote to his old associate four times a year and informed him afresh upon the merits of Costaragua. The fate of Honduras in the past, the luckless exploitation of that magnificent territory by unscrupulous brigands in London, was like a nightmare to Orlando Per-

kins, who bewailed the fact that he could not influence capitalists of the right mettle to look toward Costaragua.

And yet, reflected Mr. Farquharson in his office in Victoria Street, how could one blame the capitalists? Here was a railway concession already twenty-five years old and no more than half that number of miles had been laid—and on an Irish gauge at that. And here was five years' work on the Corcubion bank reduced to a mass of slush and rusty iron. It was impracticable. Give it up! He drew a map from a drawer in his desk and spread it upon the blotter. It was a map of the Republic of Costaragua. In the dark, panelled office, by the light of the screened and reflected sunlight, the pale colours of the delicately engraved paper shone as with a transparent radiance of their own. He noted the feathery circle that was Albatorre, the irregular shape ending to the northward in the volcanic cone of Cornaru, and in the central plateau, beyond the almost impregnable barriers of the Cordillera, the black square that was San Benito. Farquharson saw one trouble at least as he contemplated the map. He had often told Perkins that he would always have trouble until he had a port. At the point where the railway was supposed to start there was not even a name. Perkins had referred optimistically to Puerto Balboa, but that was a mere euphemism for a line of palms between two stretches of jungle, a ribbon of white sand, and a long cay a mile or so off shore that broke

to some extent the enormous swell that came rolling in from the Atlantic round the northeastern shoulder of South America and crashed in thunderous combers upon miles of open coast. Orlando Perkins had described the splendour of that cay at sunrise, the iridescent spray on the outer eastern side flung up against the shafts of golden light, so that from the foothills beyond the swamps of the Corcubion the island was like an exploding jewel on the bosom of the blue ocean. Farquharson had dallied with the idea that he would like to see that. But—no port! Perkins should know the imperative need of a base. The anchorage was not much either—no hold, he understood. Yet that shouldn't deter him. The *conquistadores* had made it in their caravels. The old buccaneers had actually got themselves washed ashore in the Corcubion River, thinking it was a way through to the Pacific and the riches of Panama City. Men still went. Rubies and gold in those blue hills behind there. Men still went, though nobody knew just what happened to them. Something stirred in John Farquharson's breast as he stared through his glasses at the map. All his enterprises had been neat, profitable, practical, successful. They were there to-day. Yet this terrible railway that Orlando Perkins had taken over and which seemed farther than ever from completion, had over it the peculiar glamour of a desperate cause, a forlorn hope. He said to himself, and often hinted in his letters, "Give it up!" But he

would not have given it up, had he been there. He would have done something—something.

He sat for a few minutes, chin in hand, the other hand to his brow, before returning to the immediate business of the day.

Francis and Louis went home that evening very full of their new experiences. As it was a long way from Victoria Street they did not reach the Lodge until the servant was ringing the great gong for dinner. There was only one guest, the curate of St. Peter's. The Reverend Arthur Osborn was paying attention to both the Striker girls, but it was Elsa he finally made up his mind to court. He was a fine athletic young man and looked extremely smart in his dress clothes, which were an ordinary dinner coat over a clerical vest of watered silk. He had taken a good degree at Cambridge and came of a clever family. He was very unlike the popular stage conception of a curate. And he won both the young men to himself at once when they were seated round the table and the discussion turned to the best professions. Mr. Striker made a grumbling remark about it being better to stick to the Army, the Navy, the Church, and the Bar unless one went into business.

"But, my dear sir, a civil engineer nowadays has to be one of the best-educated men in the country!" said the Reverend Arthur Osborn. "I think Francis has chosen splendidly. It's a magnificent career, sir."

He spoke with conviction and Francis looked at him in dumb gratitude. Many years later other curates were the unconscious recipients of benefactions inspired by that speech.

"That chap's a brick!" Francis said to Louis when they retired.

"What do you think of Mr. Swayne, then?" asked Louis, yawning. Francis was silent for a moment.

"I don't know," he muttered. "I thought he was a duffer at first. I—I don't know."

"Are you going to his parties—you know, the studios?"

"No," said Francis stubbornly. "We've got to work, you know—at night. I didn't like that. Mind you keep away, Louis!"

Louis did not reply. His head was full of the delightful anticipations of youth.

CHAPTER VII

HAZEL "lived in" at Mrs. Salisbury's, not so much on account of the distance, which was only "down the High Road," as to relieve the congestion at home. The children were growing and had to have more room. Mrs. Heath didn't want to drive her girls away, but she did wish they could disperse a little on their own account. The Heaths seemed one of those families destined to remain, physically, very close to one another. However, there seemed a chance of something happening some day, now Hazel was started on her career as a draper's assistant, young Smith, who boarded at Mrs. Giffel's, was taking more and more interest in Fanny, and Kate's young man was home from a voyage. The latter was second mate of a sailing ship and very much in the way in the parlour, where he sat in terror of being addressed by Mr. Heath until Kate was ready to go for a walk. The bother of it was that young men didn't seem to be reliable any more. Young Smith had changed his position twice in three months, "bettering himself," as he called it, but his ambition was lofty and he had not yet become formally engaged. As for the young second mate, he couldn't possibly marry on seven pounds a

month, although he had a remarkable tale of a fellow he knew who had eight pounds and a family of six children. And he seemed very vague as to when he himself would have a raise, merely remarking to Mrs. Heath that he was "putting a bit by."

And Lena, to her own relief, left school.

Hazel did not like living in at Mrs. Salisbury's. There were three Salisbury boys, two at school and one, in the engineering, who came home in a shocking suit of greasy overalls and left the bath in a horrible state.

Mrs. Salisbury kept her shop open from eight till about ten in the evening and so found it necessary to have a sleep in the afternoon. This was the time Hazel dreaded most of all. The heavy dinner made her sleepy, and the close air of the little shop, filled as it was with an inconceivable quantity of cardboard boxes and bolts of material, caused her courage to sink to zero. If you had gone in about three you would have seen nothing at first owing to the dusk after the bright street. And then, peering over the counter, you would still have seen nobody, and would be on the point of coughing to attract attention when Hazel would step suddenly into view, her face drawn and somewhat woebegone as she asked in a thin, spiritless voice:

"What is it, please?"

She did not make very rapid progress in learning the stock either, forgetting it as soon as told. Mrs. Salisbury was a large pink blonde woman, very quiet

and gentle to customers, but rather terrible to Hazel. She had a way of closing her lips and walking firmly to the article she had asked for, getting it herself and ignoring Hazel for some time after. Or she would say quietly, "I thought I'd told you" and go away upstairs for a few minutes, leaving Hazel in agony, not knowing what to do.

This sort of life, with Thursday afternoons off, was not very promising, and to a girl with Hazel's powerful imagination the future assumed the proportions of a nightmare. Yet she was so tired at night she would fall asleep in the little attic bedroom the moment her head touched the pillow.

And on Sundays she stayed at home "up the road." It was on one of these occasions that she said to Lena, up in their old bedroom under the lean-to roof:

"I say, Lena, Mrs. Salisbury drinks."

"Go on."

"Yes, she does. I can smell her. Don't you think Mother ought to know?"

"What good will that do?"

"Oh, no *good*. I suppose I'd only have to go to work at Seabrook's instead. Funny thing yesterday. You know old Cotter who's always beating his wife? He came in for a collar. 'What size?' says Mrs. Salisbury. 'I dunno, mum,' he says, 'but I takes thirteens in boots,' and he leaned over the counter at her and suddenly he began to smile. He was a little bit drunk, but he must have noticed. Mrs. Salis-

bury said she'd give him in charge, and he laughed. I nearly choked."

"You'll get the sack wherever you go, Hazel," said Lena, bending over some sewing.

"I don't care."

"No, but Mother will."

"Lena, don't tease, or I shall scream!" Hazel slumped to the floor beside her sister and flung her arms round Lena's knees. She began to blubber softly against the thin cotton dress.

"Hazel, what's the matter?"

"Oh, I ca-an't! I ca-an't——!" she sobbed.

"Can't what?"

"G—go on. I hate it!" and she went on crying, her shoulders heaving, her breath whistling, her long spindly legs sprawling on the rug.

"There, there, poor old Hazel. You'll manage better soon. Hush, there's Father!"

But at the mention of her father, who never did any work, never had to meet any disagreeable things or persons, whom they all had to comfort and sustain, Hazel sobbed more violently than ever.

"Oh, do hush, Hazel," said Lena. "What is it you want? There, there!"

For a while Hazel, who had been staving off this explosion for a week, went on crying and trying to stifle her sobs. At last she quieted down and there was silence save for an intermittent hiccough. They could hear Mr. Heath moving about his room. Why was it that the thought of her father, acting upon her

troubled mood, gave Hazel so much misery? It was a kind of jealousy. Hazel felt herself worthy of esteem and nobody esteemed her. As she stood behind the counter in the little corner shop down the road with the smelly Mrs. Salisbury moving about in the shadows, and possibly the elder Salisbury boy, home from the engine works, bawling from the bathroom door for another kettle of hot water, it seemed to her she was surrounded by detestable beings who *wouldn't* see her for what she was. She wanted to take Mrs. Salisbury by the shoulders and scream at her: "Don't you understand? I'm great. I'm superior. I'm going to do wonderful things." And if Mrs. Salisbury, instead of boxing her ears and sending her home, had asked in her odorous husky whisper, "What things, my dear?" Hazel would have burst out crying and stamped her foot in mortification because she herself did not know.

Yet she had vivid insights into her own nature at times. She was always conscious, when in one of her moods of black despair, of standing aside and watching herself with extreme commiseration. Another thing interested her very much and that was the activity of her imagination in moments of acute wretchedness. Even while she sobbed against Lena's knee, she was aware of her mind, which she said had "spazzums," flying to and fro above her head, busy with a sort of angelic Hazel who was taking the lead in a world with which she was in harmony. It was not merely that, as she peered from among the boys'

ready-made suits swinging like gibbetted malefactors on either side of Mrs. Salisbury's shop door, she saw herself in the leading rôles of that imaginary world. The secret joy lying at the core of her life was the consciousness that she could describe it in words. This again seemed only a horrible delusion, for the next morning all that was left of the beautiful episode was a soiled piece of paper covered with lame sentences.

Lena did not know anything about this. She had once opened the exercise book Hazel had left on the chiffonier and had had it snatched from her hands.

"Goodness! What is it?" she had asked in simple wonder.

"Only an essay I'm doing," mumbled Hazel, and Lena's brow had cleared.

"Well, you needn't be spiteful," she had replied tolerantly. "I don't want to see your old essay."

Nor did she. She had plenty to do in the kitchen. She worked all day long, from six in the morning when she lit the fire to about nine o'clock at night when the children were safe in bed and there was nothing left to do except clean up after them. Essays were not in Lena's line at all. She had started a sampler, but her hands were so swollen with hot water and soap she couldn't feel the wool properly. There was to be an Industrial Exhibition during the winter and everybody was sending in something. Hence Hazel's glib explanation about "an essay." Lena had hoped

to finish the sampler, but was not sanguine. She was too tired to do much.

But Hazel's exercise book was half full of something nobody would call an essay. It was first called "Scenes from Drapery Life," which was crossed out, and then "A Tale of Our Village." This was finally crossed out too, and over it again she wrote, "Our Corner."

And it was as "Our Corner" she left it. She used short jerky little sentences; indeed that characteristic remains with her to this day, a sort of breathlessness that infuriates men who try to read her books and holds the women with hoops of steel. She wrote down what went on at the corner at different hours of the day. There was Mrs. Salisbury's corner with the suits dangling, most of them marked nineteen and elevenpence three farthings, a subtle suggestion that you got change out of a sovereign. There was Parrott's Dairy at the next corner northward, with attendant excitement of large brown cows mistaking the way in and making a dart into the pawnshop that flaunted its enormous brass balls at the diagonal corner. Hazel was almost intoxicated with the joy of writing down the lists of things for sale outside the pawnshop. Here was born another of her characteristic tricks, the recounting and piling up of facts and making them seem suddenly important and poetic. And finally the other corner was Harmon's, the corn merchant's. In there were enormous bins of peas and beans and maize, bins of flour and grain,

each a beautiful colour, from the rich yellow of the maize to the polished mosaic of the stuff you bought for chickens. Old Mr. Harmon always wore light-coloured suits so that the flour didn't show on them, at least not very much; and he was fond of standing at the door, which was at the corner. It was Hazel's fancy that the curve of his enormous waistcoat just completed the lines of the shop-front. In the window was a very large picture of an impossibly proud rooster and a white plaster-of-paris model of a horse with a tail quite unlike any extant tails going up and down the High Road. But, as Hazel said, in a sort of inspiration, in her description of Harmon's corner, it was a peculiar problem—window-dressing for a corn chandler. That, indeed, was almost the first time Hazel had what she afterward called "a gleam." How much she depended on "gleams" she never confessed to anybody. But her private terror still is this—that she will never have any more "gleams."

At that time, however, there were so many things to see from that corner, Our Corner, that she would almost turn faint at ever putting them all down in one penny exercise book. At the far end of Beaconsfield Road, seen between the pawnshop and Harmon's, was the wall of the railway, and she knew by the shriek and sudden rise of a huge white whale of vapour above the wall that a fast train to Scotland was going by. Halfway along was the school which she had left with so much regret and Lena with such

quiet satisfaction. Up the High Road was the police station on the site of the cottage where she had been born. In between was the sweet-stuff shop, and Hazel could tell a great deal about many of the families from the way the children visited this place. She put it down in the exercise book. She put down the arrival of Pickford's weekly van with the fresh stock Mrs. Salisbury had ordered from the travellers from Wood Street. She even put down the expressions of the sheep who hung upside down in Polly's, the butcher's, which was, Hazel noted with a fluttering heart, next door to Parrott, the dairyman. Each sheep had a little tin cup tied on its nose to catch any drip, and the awful knowing look in a sheep's eye as Hazel went past haunted her.

But the exercise book had long periods of solitary confinement when Hazel couldn't put anything down. Along in October, on a clear cool evening, just as night was falling in fact, Hazel coming up the Station Road from posting a letter, saw Louis Chaillu coming straight toward her. His face was illumined for a moment under a street lamp and Hazel, in obedience to a sudden feeling of shame, turned to cross over. She was wearing a thin old jacket with a woollen muffler on her neck, and Louis was magnificent in a new winter overcoat.

As she hurried across the road Louis hesitated and then followed her. Hazel began to hurry, her heart pounding dreadfully with fear and delight. All her misery at Mrs. Salisbury's was forgotten. Even the

fact that she had been bidden to hurry back to the shop escaped her memory as she hurried on up to the bridge that led over to Holly Park.

"Hazel! Hazel!" she heard Louis calling anxiously behind her, and she began to run. It was quite dark just there, with a splash of dazzling radiance at the top of the road where the Railway Hotel stood. Louis began to run too, and suddenly Hazel stopped and cowered by the fence, so that Louis had her in his arms.

"Oh, how dare you!" she gasped, looking up at him.

"Hazel!" he panted, and they stood still for a moment, each at a loss for breath.

"You have tried to keep away from me," he said at length.

"No," she said, looking at the ground. "No."

"You have never been to that place again," he went on. "I have waited, so many times."

"I couldn't," she mumbled. "Mother's against it. I must go now. I work in a shop."

"I know," said Louis. "I have seen you. I want to come and buy something in your shop."

"Oh, my goodness," she cried and giggled at once. "You mustn't." The idea of the magnificent Louis in Mrs. Salisbury's shop was too much for Hazel. She laughed.

"Yes," he went on, seeing the change in her mood and following up the advantage. "I will come in and buy everything in the shop."

"And then I won't have anything to do," argued

Hazel. She was close to the fine winter overcoat and she caught a whiff of the perfume on his handkerchief.

"I would like to buy you and shut up the shop and take you away," he announced fiercely.

Hazel's eyes closed for a moment as she caught through the timbre of his young ardent voice her old illusion of the fair Ellaline. She was conscious of her own untrammelled youth for a moment. Indeed, for a while, in his company, the dreadful load of English life slipped from her shoulders. England was a symbol of remorseless and impersonal demands. Her greatness was like Moloch in its insatiable hunger for youth. Childhood and adolescence were heavy things in that land. From the little children who hurried in wooden clogs to the factory before the dawn, to the boys who maintained the austere discipline of her great schools and carried the responsibility of their station in the Navy, the young people were the victims of a kind of secular spiritual servitude. Hazel in Mrs. Salisbury's shop, Lena in her mother's kitchen, Lillian Mills on the rack of her mother's genteel ideals, were human sacrifices to an invisible yet omnipotent abstraction. And it was only by some fortunate combination of circumstance and mood that one could escape for a while, with a feeling that one was imperilling the soul, none the less, from the universal thrall. Hazel, in the clear cold autumn night, as she loitered in the shadows of the Station Road, had no place where she could love or be loved. There was apparently nothing in life

save duty. All else was naughty and improper. Later on, perhaps, everyone would have said. Mrs. Salisbury would have made a husky reference to the earning of "bread and butter," though Hazel got very little butter down there. It was either margarine or dripping. And here was this tall beautiful blond youth, who must have had some touch of genius since he could perceive, in the guise of a shabby spectacled girl, a woman with an extraordinarily sensitive soul.

"Hazel," he said, holding her by the shoulders, "I have written a poem about our tree in the wood. It is to you."

"Oh!" said she, with a sudden impish desire to cover him with ridicule, "Oh, how clever of you, Mr. Louis! How did you do it? Quite an honour, I'm sure!" And she tittered.

"Hazel!" he protested in alarm. He did not know that this was the way of her race and class when confronted suddenly with sentiment. He was hurt through his youthful vanity. "I thought you would like it."

"Oh, very pleased, I'm sure!" she went on, smirking in the dark.

"Will you come for a walk with me, Hazel?"

Hazel suddenly remembered the shop. She saw Mrs. Salisbury peering out looking for her to come running breathlessly along the Beaconsfield Road. St. Peter's Church struck eight solemn strokes. Her mood changed as she listened.

"Really truly?" she whispered.

"Very much," he answered.

"Well," she went on quickly, "I've got to get back to the shop. We close at nine. I'll come then."

"Oh! Where?" he asked.

"Here! I must tear off now. I'll catch it something horrible. See you later."

And she was off like a streak across the road.

Mrs. Salisbury was peering out exactly as Hazel had foreseen. She was very quiet and very husky and very angry.

"What's kept you I'd like to know, miss?" she asked, following Hazel back of the counter.

"I met my sister Lena and she made me go up the road with her," said Hazel.

"What for, I'd like to know?"

"Something at home," invented Hazel. And she added with a flash of inspiration, "I have to go up home after closing, Mrs. Salisbury. I don't think Mother's well." Hazel looked serious.

"We'll see about that," was the disappointing reply. "I'm far from well myself."

Hazel registered a mental hope that Mrs. Salisbury would never get better but very much worse.

"It's a funny thing, your sister should keep you all *that* time," went on Mrs. Salisbury, folding up underwear and laying it in boxes.

"She's very funny, my sister Lena," said Hazel.

"Very. I should say, very funny indeed," agreed Mrs. Salisbury. Hazel, behind the high barricade of

collar boxes, said nothing but put out her tongue. She was in a mood, as she told herself, "for two pins she'd scratch Mrs. Salisbury's eyes out." And she seemed to be hunting for those two pins. Mrs. Salisbury, after pushing the boxes back into place, mumbled her way into the back room where her youngest was doing his homework by the light of an oil lamp on a red tablecloth. Mrs. Salisbury was not a happy woman, owing to her worldly affairs not being in very good shape. She owed rather more money than the business justified and she drank a good deal in small nips with the idea of forgetting her troubles. She had no real animus toward Hazel, but she could not escape the universal urge to clap young persons in irons and lay upon their tender bodies and souls the large burdens of the world. Later on, when her sons grew up and prospered, Mrs. Salisbury's life was easier and she became quite human in her old age.

At nine o'clock, after completing the sale of a card of buttons to Mrs. Sanders's maid, Hazel began to shut up shop. The shutters had to be put up, for they were of wood and stored in the cellar. One of the boys was supposed to do this, it being too heavy for a girl. But to-night Hazel could hardly wait. She had a job to keep herself from going down and dragging those shutters up herself. She had not realized, in the complexity of her imagination and the inexperience of her heart, how much of her recent misery had sprung from the apparent futility of that

former evening encounter with Louis Chaillu. All her sense and reason told her it *couldn't* be otherwise than something over and gone, something like her "spazzums in the mind," as she called those fugitive manifestations of her private fancy. Hazel would never admit even to herself all that happened that moonlit night. Sometimes she felt she could never *bear* to meet Louis again.

She smiled at Jack Salisbury's scowling face as he trudged through the shop bearing a shutter. Jack Salisbury was too busy with his own thoughts to notice the significance of this smile. Its full meaning was that Hazel, who for reasons of her own had adopted the disguise of a menial servant, was about to resume her own glorious semblance for a few hours. Jack thought her a little beast of a kid and wished his mother had a big shop like Seabrook's with errand boys and a shopwalker in a frock coat.

Hazel, putting on her muffler and jacket stood in front of the little mirror behind the collar boxes. Her elbow brushed the sleeve of a particularly nice heavy cloak that hung on a headless frame model in the corner. A sudden idea came to her. Lifting the cloak from the frame she put it over her own shoulders. Lovely! Hazel's gray eyes flashed as she looked at herself in the mirror. She was calculating the chances of slipping out before Mrs. Salisbury came back.

"Fat chance!" she whispered drearily, taking the cloak off slowly. "Fat chance!"

She was right. The bulk of Mrs. Salisbury's body was sidling along behind the counter as Hazel turned.

"Take your things off this minute, Hazel Heath. *I* know what you want to go out for."

"Oh, Mrs. Salisbury, I do have to go home, indeed I do," cried Hazel, stamping her foot.

Mrs. Salisbury was standing before the open cash drawer putting the day's takings in a thick blue envelope for the night.

"I know all about the Penny Readings," said Mrs. Salisbury with a shake of the head.

"Penny Readings!" repeated Hazel. "I never even thought of it being to-night."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Salisbury. "Here you are and here you stay. Lena can come for you if she wants you so bad."

Hazel was trapped behind the counter and Jack was fitting the shutters noisily on the shop door. Soon it would be impossible to get out. And Louis was waiting for her.

She looked at Mrs. Salisbury, noting the sag of her pink jowls, the rolls of fat on her wrists, the grand protuberance of her high bosom with the jet brooch. In every fibre of her slender vital body and eager mind she despised that tyrannical and obese woman. Why should she, of all girls, be a slave to such a *thing?* She who could see the story of Our Corner, she, the Kapellmeister's daughter! Hazel drew a deep breath and suddenly sprang from the rung of a stool upon the

counter, skinning her knee on the screw that stuck up from the brass yard measure on the edge.

"Hazel Heath!" Mrs. Salisbury, hampered by the cash drawer, which jammed as she lunged against it, made an ineffectual clutch. But Hazel was over and on the floor. In an instant she had flitted past Jack at the door, even as Mrs. Salisbury panted: "Stop her, Jack, stop that girl!" had darted across to Harmon's corner and was gone up the dark and empty Beaconsfield Road.

It occurred to her while she was running that she ought to have gone up High Road if she expected Mrs. Salisbury to believe her tale about Lena. Well, the milk was spilt now. Suppose Louis had gone! No, he was there; and as she came up to him he took her, frankly and beautifully, in his arms.

"Oh, I say," she breathed heavily in his ear, "you mustn't. Really you mustn't. I believe I've got the sack."

"I'm glad," said Louis, drawing her arm through his and starting to walk toward the bridge.

"What about me?" she returned. "Mother'll be in a fine wax when she hears. Mrs. Salisbury believes I've gone off to the Penny Readings."

"What's that? I don't understand."

"Oh, it's down in the St. Peter's schoolroom every Thursday night. A sort of concert, you know. A penny admission."

"You want to go?"

"No, of course not."

"Then let us go for a walk. Will you be my girl, Hazel? I have so many things to tell you." He pressed her hand tenderly.

Hazel did not reply immediately. She was no longer in that mood of exasperating coyness that expresses itself in a kind of uneasy impudence. She was aware, in spite of the terrors of what was to come, when Mrs. Salisbury panted up to Haythorne Terrace and saw Mrs. Heath about it, that something more important than "a row" was taking place. Lena was a poor confidant, Hazel discovered now. As she and Louis walked across the common toward Friern Barnet, the hard springy turf under their feet, the lights of distant cottages shining cheerfully in the clear darkness of early autumn, she told him more than she had ever told a human being in her life. She knew well enough that, when he asked her to be his girl, he had no thought of marriage in mind. It meant they were to walk together and tell each other secrets and perhaps, once again, kiss with shy rapture. And now that she had done something herself, accepted a grave responsibility in defying Mrs. Salisbury, it seemed to her the difference in their stations was bridged. After all, the thought flitted through her mind:

"I shall soon be seventeen, eighteen. Oh, my goodness. I'm not in pinafores any more," and she added to herself:

"I don't care!"

"Yes," she said to Louis. "I've read—oh, heaps

of Dickens. Don't you love Dickens? Yes, of course I've read 'The Hunchback of Notre Dame.' I like 'Rienzi,' don't you?"—she pronounced it "Reenzi"—"All Lyttons'. I've always been good at essays, but that's nothing. I wanted to go to Dame Owen's, but it costs so much we couldn't manage it. It's awful being poor, Father being an invalid ever since I was born."

He told her about his work in Victoria Street, how he and Francis went out surveying generally down in the East End among the docks, where Perkins, Perkins and Partners were supervising contracts to lengthen old basins for the big new ships.

"I expect I shall give it all up when I am twenty-five and devote myself to poetry," he said loftily.

"After you've made a fortune?" said Hazel wistfully. Making fortunes seemed very far away from her in those days. She sighed.

"You'll forget all about me in no time," she remarked. Louis put his arm around her. "You mustn't," she said in a low tone.

"But, Hazel, I do not understand!" he protested with his hands outspread suddenly in one of his charming foreign gestures. "Do you forget me? How we—kiss?"

"Yes, I remember, but I was very silly," she returned, and she added, "I must go back home now, please."

Louis was in a quandary. His conversations with the Striker family, cautiously carried on with a view

to discovering the complexities of English social life, had led him to consider Hazel's family less *petit bourgeois* than actual menials. The Strikers' gardener, Mr. Kitching, lived next door. The servants at the Lodge were of the same sturdy and standoffish type as the Heath girls. Once when he had passed Lena and Fanny in the street he had lifted his hat gracefully and they had gone by with their heads rather high and without perceptible recognition. This was the more puzzling since Mrs. Mills had made most distinguished obeisance on another occasion, startling him, since he had forgotten he had seen her talking to Mrs. Striker when she was selling something. And in the fermenting and sanguine mind of the young man, who had been more sensitive to the life of the Quais in Rouen than his friend Francis imagined, this elusive and fragrantly sentimental companionship with Hazel assumed the guise of an incipient *affaire*. Yet, as far as he could detect, even bearing in mind Mr. Herbert Swayne's magnificent flourishes about bohemian life, and an occasional awed peep at Piccadilly by night (which revolted him), Louis was bound to conclude that, in England, people didn't have affairs with seamstresses and tradesmen's daughters. Hazel's eagerness, her fresh and unsullied clarity of mind at their first encounter, had inspired in him a number of delightful conjectures. The agreeable logic of his race, coupled with the distractions and strangeness of settling into a new existence, had prevented him from seeing Hazel.

There was, moreover, Francis with his moody and heavy-handed disapproval, and the difficulty of meeting a girl who lived in a house full of sisters.

"Go back! But why? It is only about ten o'clock," he protested. Hazel turned.

"I must go back," she repeated. She was growing afraid of the lie she had told Mrs. Salisbury.

"You don't like me very much," grumbled Louis, trying to take her hand and peering into her tense little face in the darkness.

Hazel did not reply. She lacked as yet the courage to risk family anger. She only hurried along, Louis by her side touching her arm with a timid attempt at possessiveness. She scarcely noticed him as she saw in imagination Mrs. Salisbury sitting in awful state in the front room and her mother and sisters all round discussing Hazel's latest. Lena, when appealed to, would simply have to give her away. Hazel could see that. What a mad thing to do! All for a walk with Louis.

"I'm getting into trouble for you," she hissed.

"But I do not understand," said Louis. "Why do you fear your mother? It is nothing, a little walk. I will tell your mother if you like."

Hazel saw she was unjust. She turned to him, slowing in her pace as they came to the bridge.

"I told Mrs. Salisbury my sister wanted me at home because of illness," she explained. "And I had to run, even then, because she didn't believe me. And Mother will do something awful——oh!"

And Hazel hurried on.

And then a wonderful thing happened which Hazel mused upon for a good many days afterward. As they came in sight of the lamp post which had been recently erected near Haythorne Terrace, Hazel saw a brougham at the kerb, the carriage lamp throwing a dim light upon the path and the gate of her home.

"Oh, my goodness!" she gasped. "It's Doctor Ffoulkes's carriage. Whatever is the matter?"

"I thought you said it was illness," said Louis, still more mystified by Hazel's mental intricacies.

Hazel stood stock still for a moment, in the grip of a sudden superstitious panic. Than she ran on, feeling she was responsible for what had happened. There were lights upstairs and down. She thought of her father. Had he——? She heard Louis calling in a low voice behind her. She pushed open the gate and ran up the path, reckless of anything that might happen to herself. And there in the front room was Mrs. Salisbury.

"Here she is," said that lady with astonishing lack of animus. "I knew there must be something the matter the minute she ran off up Beaconsfield Road to Doctor Ffoulkes. So as I was saying, I came up."

Out of breath, Hazel flung off her tam o' shanter and cloak and rushed away into the back kitchen. As she expected, Lena was there. She was making a linseed poultice. Hazel flung herself on Lena in a frenzy of whispering. Lena muttered:

"No. Why? You shouldn't——no, all right. It's Dora. Sort of cramp, I think. Mind now!" she warned, and with the basin of cruelly hot mush in her hand she hastened upstairs, leaving Hazel to marvel at the peculiar nature of her good fortune. She was not yet rid of the dreadful fancy that her falsehood had brought sickness into the house, because Dora had been "such a good child" for a week. She had been "poorly," as they say, and unusually predatory and quarrelsome, and then suddenly, although Mrs. Heath had made her stay in bed, she grew almost preternaturally calm, lying there looking out at the chickens and the heap of coal beyond the waterworks wall as though she were a grown-up person.

And then this evening, together with a feverish heat in her hands and face she had begun to cry with a pain in her abdomen, and while Lena had run for Doctor Ffoulkes they had had to watch the child convulsively clutching the clothes and writhing pitifully. Now she was quiet, the doctor having given her a sleeping draught. He said it was a colic and would pass off in a few hours, though he knew no more about it than they did. The linseed poultice was duly made and put on and perhaps eased the immediate inflammation.

As Hazel unobtrusively joined the group in the front room, a group that soon included Mrs. Mills and Mrs. Giffel, and then Miss Culvert and Lizzie Kitching, the thought came to her that she had re-

ceived an intimation of this affliction in some astral fashion. Hazel had once read a story of a sick woman waiting for her erring daughter to come to her, and she had heard that daughter's step among the millions on the city pavements outside. Perhaps it was possible. Hazel felt rather like an erring daughter herself as she listened to all those large women discussing an interminable list of illnesses which they had known or experienced. Mrs. Mills's cultured throaty tones hummed against Mrs. Giffel's hearty boom.

"Well, when *I'm* queer, I can't eat, and that's a good test for children, anyhow!"

And Miss Culvert prayed at intervals into her hand.

Presently Doctor came downstairs. He was a tall, athletic and handsome gentleman with a great shock of brown hair and a fine silky moustache. It was beginning to dawn on him that he had encountered something a little beyond the ordinary ailments of his practice. He had a serious expression on his face as he turned to Mrs. Heath with an almost inaudible murmur. There was something about taking an opinion, a consultation, and then Doctor Danbury, who was the other doctor of the neighbourhood, was mentioned. Mrs. Heath nodded. She felt the importance of this scene. There was something indefinably and mystically gratifying, after all, in having an illness that involved a consultation of doctors. Doctor Ffoulkes went out and the faint glare of the

carriage lamps, to the disappointment of the company in the parlour, went away. But they were more than compensated by Mrs. Heath herself coming in and telling them he would return with Doctor Danbury. It was a curious phenomenon, and a striking revelation of the way those local magicians could hold the imaginations of their patrons, that a confession of incompetence only increased their prestige. To have two doctors on the case was like having plumes with one's funeral or making a voyage in a ship with two funnels. It contributed to one's pride; and even Mrs. Giffel, who had often guffawed at the jolly old joke about doctors burying their mistakes, was aware of a most unusual excitement.

Hazel, almost awed by the singular nature of her own escape, got up quietly and went out into the garden for a moment with the half-formed idea of meeting the doctors. She leaned against the gate and was startled to see a dark form not far away. It came toward her where she was silhouetted against the yellow light from the hall lamp, and she saw that it was Louis.

"My goodness," she whispered. "I thought you'd gone home ages ago."

"How could I do that?" Louis whispered back. "I wished to know who is ill and if you have any trouble."

"Oh, no," she returned in a tone of grateful sincerity. "Thank you, Louis. I was a pig. It is

my little sister Dora. We expect Doctor Ffoulkes and Doctor Danbury soon. It is very serious."

Her mind ran ahead and she almost murmured "hospital" though no such suggestion had yet been made.

"Will you make my compliments? I am very sorry," said Louis, shifting his feet on the gravel. Hazel had a suspicion she was not playing up to him properly. She felt in an obscure way there was something absurd about the barriers piled up between him and herself. Why could he not come into her home and she go to his? Why was she for ever assuming funny little poses when he spoke so politely, so sincerely, and so delightfully? She swung the gate in the energy of her thoughts. But the time was not come when she could overleap those barriers. All she could do now was to reply in a troubled voice.

"Thank you . . . you are very kind, I'm sure. I must go in now. Good night."

And even without touching his hand, this warm-hearted and impulsive English girl ran indoors and left Louis to take his perplexed way to the Lodge.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he reflected. "I think she is a coquette." Yet the answer did not satisfy his mind at all. He comprehended somewhat the fact that an English girl's essential divinity lay at the core of a multitude of harsh and repelling sheaths; he could not hope to find the real Hazel with the directness and grave facility that attended an encounter with a girl of his own race. This England in which he was

for the time immured made upon him the impression not so much of a foreign country as of a different world. In the arena of the emotions, in particular, he was conscious of a suspicion that not only did they not share his own feelings, but that they were unaware of the existence of such feelings at all—that Hazel, when she had kissed him that moonlight night, for example, had been under the spell of some extra-terrestrial hallucination rather than the delicious stupor of an adolescent and earthly love. He saw this sharp divergence of fundamental motives and desires in many directions—in Francis's dogged fidelity to his books, in the Striker girls' attitude toward the young men with whom they danced and played tennis—an attitude compounded of coolness and apparent disgust of all human contacts. As he walked down Haythorne Road and crossed to the Lodge Louis played with the notion that he lacked the key to the character of his friends. He was not the youth to indulge in criticism. His own nature was like those electric lamps that require a certain degree of warmth before they can begin to glow with their own current. Louis, with all his preoccupation with poetry and philosophy, could never stand alone. Without either of them knowing it other than as a tender sentiment, he depended on Francis for his spiritual existence.

CHAPTER VIII

IT BECAME clear to observers like Mrs. Giffel that the Heath family would one of these days emerge from their very difficult circumstances, when Dora was "taken." Doctor Ffoulkes, even when assisted by Doctor Danbury, did not know what to do. Eventually they became convinced that it was a hospital case and Dora was moved to an immense institution in the City. There, because of the continual motion of the cab over rough stones and the hasty handling of underpaid assistants, she arrived with very little chance of recovery. The tumour, as it was regarded, had burst, and her whole system was charged with poison. She died in a kind of coma, and the Heaths were confronted for the first time in their family life with the problem of death.

And it might almost be hinted that he came as a friend. Dora's mother retired within an impenetrable reserve upon the subject. The exact nature of the grief experienced by the whole family as they carried the small gray-cloth coffin to the cemetery would be most difficult to analyze. Perhaps Lena's was the most genuine, because to her Dora had been a special scourge of whips and scorpions. It appalled Lena to watch the child's body growing larger

and the soul, one might say, smaller. Dora's demand for affection had been abnormal and her capacity for returning it non-existent. She had been like a sick animal, and the look in her eyes startlingly morose. All the energy of her character was deflected into the resentment engendered by an uncomprehended malady.

The event seemed, as Mrs. Giffel shrewdly noted, to set things going all round for the Heaths. For almost before any one could realize it, Katie and Fanny were actually engaged, and the banns had been read three times in St. Peter's Church. Young Smith had become a secretary with three pounds a week and Fanny had named the day. This desperate exploit had communicated a certain valour to Katie's young man, who had been mentioned as a second mate on leave from his ship. Jack Hakin's parents were esteemed pillars of the chapel congregation. Old Hakin was a builder in a small way who had taken the contract for the chapel pews and pulpit without making very much out of it. He preached at times, to the great discomfort of his family, for it was his habit to pound the pulpit in his excitement, and Mrs. Hakin was in terror lest his spiritual power should be too much for his professional skill. Jack had gone to sea without any great illusions about its romantic nature, and he certainly brought none back. The Heath family might have been pardoned if they had concluded that Jack Hakin was kept under hatches during the entire voyages he was alleged to

make, so very scanty was the information he had acquired concerning foreign parts. He was a stout, truculent-looking creature, invariably encased, no matter what the weather, in a blue double-breasted suit with trousers too long so that they adopted a concertina effect about his ankles. Nobody knew exactly why Kate, a rather refined-looking girl and clever as a pupil-teacher, should have fallen in love with Jack Hakin. Perhaps "fallen in love" is a misleading term. It evokes a vision of something happening and so fails. The intercourse of Jack and Kate—so far as the general public, represented by Mrs. Giffel, and their relations, in the person of Hazel Heath, were concerned—took place in a vacuum. In the house, Jack remained in a state of respectful alarm toward Mr. Heath, who invariably knew more about Calcutta, or Rangoon, or Bahia Blanca, or Trieste, than Jack did, who had been there. Jack, like most seamen, had his own way of pronouncing foreign names, and it only closed him up for the evening to correct him. Mrs. Giffel, hovering on the edge of the party, as was her way, extracted much exquisite pleasure from Jack's occasional lurches into conversation. She loved to make him say Trieste, which he would call Try-east, or Fiume, in which he omitted the second letter in pronouncing it. "He says it so often you'd think he was saying it right," was Mrs. Giffel's silent comment as she listened with shining eyes. Such was Jack Hakin as fiancé to the dignified Kate and an

admirable potential brother-in-law for young Smith. Jack, indeed, was one of the few to whom Smith confided his patent ink-holder. Jack went so far as to say that when he got a ship of his own and could save money on his pickings he'd invest in the ink-holder. There were no fountain pens in those days, and order-takers used to carry little safety ink-bottles in their vest pockets. Smith had invented a pen connected by a rubber tube to a receptacle in any pocket to save the operator's time. Smith was an early apostle of eliminating waste motion. Fanny was not long getting all that nonsense out of his head and making him over into a civilized human being. He was, so Mrs. Giffel said, a born husband, and he had roomed with her long enough for her to know what she was talking about.

These events followed Dora's funeral so closely that they appeared to derive from it, and they were accompanied by another change.

"I don't know how it is, but haven't you noticed Mrs. Heath looks so much younger lately?" said Mrs. Mills to Mrs. Giffel. "And even dear Mr. Heath has improved. It must be such a relief to have the two eldest girls engaged. Gives the others a chance. Dear Willy used to say nothing kept girls back so much as to have their younger sisters married over their heads."

Mrs. Mills was quite right about Mr. Heath. His health had improved. His appetite was better and he spoke of being able to do something. His portly

figure, with the broad Assyrian beard laid flat against the tightly buttoned frock coat, paced majestically through the lanes and roads of West Barnet. He was much more impressive than old Mr. Haythorne, whose brewery gave him an income of about ninety thousand pounds a year. Old Mr. Haythorne wore the most shocking clothes, and was never so happy as when farming, in foul old gaiters and a whipcord tail coat with pockets a foot wide. Mr. Heath took his walks, and, as Mrs. Giffel said, you'd think he owned the village. There was a gesture of his, a trick of raising his stick in salute and staring impassively at you with circular eyes, that was extraordinarily suggestive of royalty. Indeed, if he had been a Grand Duke in retirement, a title suggested by his beard, Mr. Heath could not have improved upon his manner. When he descended the High Road to purchase perhaps some butter or other light provender, when Mrs. Heath was finishing a dress for somebody and Lena couldn't leave the kitchen, he would stop at Mrs. Salisbury's door on the corner and raise his stick.

"Well, my dear," he would say to Hazel, who might be at the top of the rickety ladder putting away ladies' stockings, "and how are we this morning?"

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Heath," Mrs. Salisbury would remark. "Hazel's doing nicely, thanks. Won't you have a glass of ginger beer, now?"

"Well," Mr. Heath would say, looking with severe

attention at something a long way down the street, "on second thought, I think I will, Mrs. Salisbury."

He would then enter the shop slowly, looking approvingly at the articles exposed for sale (and there were a good many) as though the shop had been his idea and his speculation and he was pleased to find it doing so well.

"Well, Hazel, doing all right, my dear? That's right." And he would pass into the room behind the shop where Mrs. Salisbury provided two stone gingers each laced with an eggcup full of gin.

The trouble with Mr. Heath's malady was that, while it effectually prevented him from working, it carried no conviction to the onlooker. Even Mrs. Giffel avoided direct comment, contenting herself with hoarse allusions to the age of miracles being evidently past. Another unfortunate feature was that with improving health Mr. Heath discovered in himself an added capacity for human society. So while Hazel minded the shop and racked her brains over the change from two half-crowns for three pairs of babies' socks at elevenpence three farthings, he and Mrs. Salisbury would pass the time of day. Sometimes, but not often, a second ginger beer would follow the first and the measure of gin would be slightly increased. But not often. He would then set out once more on his majestic progress, raising his stick to all whom he knew. And everybody knew Mr. Heath and how very unlucky he had been in life after such a brilliant beginning. Mr. Pepper, Tom

Pepper's father, who kept a "hair-dresser's shop" next the Rose and Crown, and who was for ever in need of a shave himself, would say, as he stood at his door in his shirt sleeves:

"See that gentleman there? Old Mr. Heath. Had a breakdown many years ago. Can't work. Why, if he hadn't had his breakdown he'd ha' got into Parliament long ago. That's what he would ha' done."

"Can't work, eh?" the stranger would say in some doubt of what line to take.

"Ah, nervous breakdown. Seven children, all girls. With his brains, he'd ha' done anything if he hadn't had that accident."

Which was handsome of Mr. Pepper, for Mr. Heath was a poor customer, being partly bald and growing a full beard. But Pepper was a bit of a fraud, and his habit of praising Mr. Heath made people wonder if the latter were a fraud too. As a fact, both were men of formidable vitality and would have achieved considerable worldly success in a new country. In England, without the lever of capital, they remained more or less picturesque failures.

There was great excitement when young Smith let it be known that he was going to take Fanny away. If he had proposed marooning her on one of the distant islands of Polynesia, they would have been no more upset than at the exile of their daughter to Clapham. Mr. Smith's singular success in obtaining

an appointment as secretary to an art dealer in Sloane Street made it impossible for him to live in North London. Clapham was more convenient and, in Smith's opinion, more fashionable than West Barnet.

As for Jack Hakin, he was in a quandary. His new ship, a steamer of the tramp variety, was owned by a London company but usually sailed from the Tyne. Most men of his calling had their homes near the great seaports of the north country, but as Jack's voyages would be from four to six months in duration, he would be only a very casual boarder in his wife's house. It was a noticeable thing, however, the general air of innocent bliss upon his truculent countenance as he went round with Kate after that young lady had named the day. It modified for a time his usual unfortunate manner, which was described by Mrs. Giffel to Mrs. Mills. "He looks as though he was trying to lose her without attracting attention," said Mrs. Giffel, and it really did seem, from his habit of drifting away from Kate, so that she was always drawing herself to him by her outstretched arm, as though he were heartily ashamed of his share in the business.

Mr. Heath came out into unexpected prominence in the family councils by taking a very decided stand in favour of the weddings to take place in St. Peter's. This was a surprise to the younger generation, for they were unable to comprehend the animosity of Mr. Heath's early days between Church and Chapel. The Methodists had not then become the outer bul-

wark of a solid and wealthy bourgeois community. For Mr. Heath a Wesleyan chapel was all very well for religious consolation, but an important social ritual like a wedding must be solemnized under the protection of the Church of England. It was settled without much discussion, for Fanny and Katie had always gone to St. Peter's, and Mrs. Heath, while she went to chapel herself, had no sound argument to advance against the proposal. Miss Culvert, however, was dashed. She was also rather frightened at her own temerity, for she had imagined that the Heaths would all, in time, gravitate toward the chapel. The funeral of Dora, followed by the Wesleyan Sunday-school class who had suffered most from Dora's eccentric conception of Christian charity, bearing a wreath paid for from their own halfpennies and pennies, seemed to Miss Culvert a triumph for the Nonconformists. Mr. Heath, however, did not apparently consider even a funeral comparable with a wedding. And who shall say he was wrong? Death is a simple and austere phenomenon. Marriage is the king pin of the social mechanism.

Mr. Smith, however, happened to decide the exact date of the double event, since he could only get a fortnight's holiday in October and any other time would be out of the question. Art, it appeared, was a jealous mistress, and art dealers, taking a cue from her, were strict in their discipline. So in October the house was turned upside down. Hazel "lived in" continuously at Mrs. Salisbury's, and Mrs. Salisbury

herself sent for a consignment of stuffs for the brides' trousseaux. Lena, from early morning till late at night, scrubbed, swept, and cooked, with occasional debauches of washing and ironing, so that she, more than any one, garnered priceless experience and practice against the day, as the family said, "when she would have a house of her own." However, it could not be denied that the family derived a certain material benefit from Lena's services, "unpaid," as they say of private secretaries to cabinet ministers, in the house. Miss Culvert volunteered to take charge of Margaret and Septima, to get them out of the way, with unhappy results upon their digestions, since Miss Culvert never locked up her supplies of raisins, currants, candied peel, and dried apples, and no one had informed the children concerning the peculiar manner in which these provisions swell after being swallowed. And Mrs. Giffel, who really seemed to abstract more pleasure out of her fellow mortals than any human being had any right to get, was in and out constantly. Cicely, who was to be a bridesmaid along with Lillian Mills, acquired a misogynistic tendency from the ceaseless trying-on of a new dress. Mrs. Mills could be seen at times in her front room, her mouth full of pins, while Lillian stood with various portions of a garment sticking upon her person as though she were a building in a condition of extreme disrepair.

Hazel seemed to remain outside of the excitement. To tell the truth she resented the attention her elder

sisters were getting. She was like most nascent and youthful artists, having all the disagreeable features of genius without much of its achievement or even its superficial brilliance. She burned internally, we may suppose; but all that West Barnet could see was unpleasant smoke and occasional gusts of lurid sparks. Only Mrs. Giffel could find it in her heart to understand the spectacled gray-eyed girl whose upper half was visible above Mrs. Salisbury's counter these days. Since Dora had died it almost seemed as though that child's belligerent and cantankerous spirit had lodged in Hazel's body. It is possible that economic causes lay behind some of her moods. A good part of Hazel's seven shillings a week for several weeks was diverted in the general fund for financing the necessary outlay for the weddings. Then part of her money box—four and six to be exact—went for a wedding present to Fanny. And since somehow or other neither Hazel herself nor anybody else ever thought of her in connection with pretty clothes, and since she refused to be a bridesmaid, one of her sister Fanny's old frocks fell to her after a little altering at the back. It had enormous leg-of-mutton sleeves and a high boned collar, and it made Hazel look like "something at Madame Tussaud's," as Mrs. Giffel growled to Miss Culvert, who was shocked, since her naïve impression was that the famous waxworks consisted entirely of horrors.

Mrs. Giffel was sympathetic in her own way, however, and it was a tribute to her personality that

her sympathy reached Hazel's tormented spirit and compensated for many of the inevitable agonies of adolescence. Without in any way assuming an attitude of superiority, Mrs. Giffel was becoming a personage. Originally with the sole idea of earning a slight addition to her very small income, she had begun to do local reporting for the Barnet *Guardian.* She covered tea meetings, concerts, district councils, football and cricket matches, and even wrote an amusing column describing a sham fight that took place in the Haythorne grounds between local corps of volunteers. The editor cut it so ingeniously that he retained the news without the amusing part, but Mrs. Giffel was not sufficiently artistic to become temperamental. She had the making of a first-class journalist, for she had the flair for news and the knack of being on the spot. Also she lacked, as has been said, the egotism to resent anonymity. Very few of her neighbours were aware of her identity though she herself made no secret of it. Her hearty voice could be heard booming in the entrance just as a concert was beginning as she pushed past the ticket collectors with the words "Press! I'm for the *Guardian!*" and in she came, the embodiment of vociferous good nature.

But it was this rather unusual feature of Mrs. Giffel's character that made a peculiar bond between her and Hazel Heath. Hazel, when she comprehended that the pieces in the *Guardian* were by Mrs. Giffel, regarded her with an awe almost beyond

words. When that lady came into Mrs. Salisbury's for something, Hazel did not rest until she had mentioned, in a very roundabout way, that she had written a piece of poetry. Did Mrs. Giffel really believe the *Guardian* would print it in their "Poet's Corner"?

It was a scene worthy of those defunct artists who dealt so deftly with scenes of historical *genre*. Mrs. Salisbury was having her afternoon nap, and business at Our Corner, as Hazel called it in her "Sketches of Suburban Life," was slow. There was Mrs. Giffel in a remarkable bonnet of which it is enough to say, it was a bonnet doing its best to be a hat, and in the effort it stuck out over her dark unruly hair like a jib boom over a figurehead. It gave Mrs. Giffel a reckless and undaunted look. She stumped to and fro between the counter and the high-piled boxes of goods, the dummies comfortably clad in winter cloaks, and bumped into the inanimate youth (with a black shining nob for a head) whose Scotch cheviot was priced at seventeen and eleven. Over the counter leaned Hazel, her gray eyes enlarged in the convex glasses as they stared at Mrs. Giffel.

Mrs. Giffel stumped to and fro deliberating what to do for Hazel. She wanted to lend her books and wondered whether Mrs. Heath would mind. It was time Hazel had some other food besides Keats and Sunday-school stories. Mrs. Giffel kept the news from Miss Culvert and Mrs. Mills that she herself read real problem novels. She had a copy of

"Robert Elsmere," and she was not sure she might not get into trouble if Hazel told her mother.

"Well, child," said Mrs. Giffel at length, "I know they won't do any harm, but parents are kittle cattle, you know. Keep it in your bedroom and I'll lend it you. I'll look after the poem. Leave it to me. I'll lend you "Alton Locke" too, and one or two others. I suppose I'm interfering," she said, half to herself, and looking out into the street, "but we've got to interfere in this world." She rubbed her nose vigorously. She was aware, more than her neighbours, of the beginnings of revolt in the hearts of the young people of that day, because her own life had been one of partial frustration. To her surprise she had discovered that a husband and child had not filled her life. She had been a long while accustoming herself to the fact that she wanted men about her. This was Mrs. Giffel's real reason for taking lodgers. Women, she would say gustily, were untidy; she would not have them. She enjoyed the collisions with men arising from her reporting work. How she chuckled to herself when she interviewed Mr. Lovett who had simultaneously opened a coal-order office and offered himself for election on the District Council! Then she had gone to see Mr. Boyce, the monumental mason, who was also a candidate. She headed the article: "Tombstones or Black Diamonds: Which Shall It Be?"

"Oh, Mrs. Giffel, do you really think so?"

"Eh?" said that lady. "Print it?" Her mind

wandered a little to the street outside, the shabby little High Road. There was Emory's cat, all sawdust from Mr. Emory's butcher-shop floor, standing in a belligerent arch of back and tail, in front of Harmon's dog, who was powdered white from sleeping on a flour-bag. Mr. Emory was hanging up a sheep, just slaughtered; the bright blood instantly made a circle of scarlet on the fresh sawdust. There was a subdued bleat from the slaughter pen, and while the woman and the girl stood in the quiet drapery shop a reddled, dirty sheep suddenly appeared from the back of Emory's and bolted up the High Road, young Emory, with his arms red to the biceps, his apron splashed with green gall and purple smears, in close pursuit.

"Oh!" said Hazel as she came out and ran to the door to look. "Look, Mrs. Giffel. It's like—oh, it's like——" She pointed to the sheep swerving first one way and then the other, followed faithfully by the sanguinary youth until he caught it suddenly round the neck in the angle of a wall. "Like me," she added in a low, colourless voice.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Giffel with a sniff. "You mustn't say that, child. What nonsense!"

"Oh, Mrs. Giffel, I feel like that here. I can't ever get away."

"You'll be getting married as soon as Fanny and Kate are off," said Mrs. Giffel vaguely.

"Oh, no. Him I like, I couldn't let him."

"Him you like! Bless the child, she's got a young

man!" growled Mrs. Giffel. "Any one we know, Hazel?"

"Well, yes," admitted Hazel. "But there's nothing definite yet."

Hazel's imagination began to work at once.

"I haven't treated him at all well," she added, running her finger along the brass yard rule in the counter.

"But what—when—how did all this happen? You've only just left school!" Mrs. Giffel exclaimed. Hazel smiled. "Well, of course, I don't pretend to know what you young things are up to. Hazel, you're an original. Do you know that?"

"Oh, Mrs. Giffel!"

"Well, I think so. Not for me to stop you. You'll go right away from us here in West Barnet. I can see that."

"You mean when I am married, like Kate?"

"Ah! Not in that sense, perhaps, Never mind!" exclaimed Mrs. Giffel, gathering up her gloves and satchel. "You read! That's your lay," she added with a comical assumption of slang. "Grounding is what you want."

Mrs. Giffel meant well and was right in the main, but Hazel never got the grounding. She has remained one of the great *illiterati.* One of the shining secrets of her immense success is that the reader never finds anything involving thought or memory. She is the high-priestess of pure, unimaginative feeling, and inspires almost a vertigo in feminine adoles-

cence. And high priestesses need very little grounding.

"I see," said Hazel, leaning hard on the counter and looking wistfully at Mrs. Giffel. The question was already forming in her mind, why didn't Mrs. Giffel write something and become famous?

Famous! When that idea entered Hazel's consciousness, it remained. It got itself mixed up in her mind with Ellaline and the mystical proceedings near the blasted oak on that memorable moonlit evening. She heard the great clanging chimes again, and there was the female Whittington of her dreams listening to the roaring of the bells. . . .

It did not take possession of her all at once. She was afraid of the very idea of it. She felt people must see into her mind, and she imagined Miss Culvert regarding her with smiling sadness and intelligent comprehension when expounding what was meant by Mary choosing the better part. When neighbours smiled as she passed she would take it to mean they suspected her of these vaunting thoughts and derided them.

When Mrs. Salisbury wagged her gray head and large puffy pink face and wheezed huskily, "All very well, all very well! Fine words don't butter no parsnips, my girl," Hazel divined a vague contempt in that lady's heart for the sweet thoughts fluttering about the dark dismal shop, thoughts released from her head like birds from an ivory tower. . . .

It bore her up, in spite of these timidities, when the life of the shop and the excitement at home made her way difficult. She was thinking of it all during the day of the wedding, where she was nothing at all, a mere sister-phantom tagging along in the wake of the main splendours of Fanny and Kate. How Hazel hated it! She was artist enough to be profoundly anti-social.

The trouble arose mainly because Hazel's family, like all families, contracted a habit of regarding each member as a static and immutable feature of the landscape. And this is true often enough to deceive not only parents but aunts and school teachers. Just now, however, Hazel was far from being static. She was changing every day. She rose from the hard little iron bed in Mrs. Salisbury's top back room with an accession of unsuspected virtue. She was aware of changes in her bodily organism and suffered fits of languor and energy. And while all of them, except perhaps Mrs. Heath herself, were aware only of the old Hazel, a new and startling Hazel was inside, ready to burst the rind and reveal herself.

Mrs. Giffel, recalling these events in after years, when she had left England for ever, was inclined to think she first saw this new portent after Barnet Fair. And indeed it was at the Fair that Hazel first drank port wine, in the bar parlour of the Red Lion—she and two other girls and three red-coated soldiers from the barracks.

The Fair was in those days the great event of the

year for most of the local population and for many people in other parts. Factory girls in Hoxton or Bethnal Green would ask each other in autumn if they were going to Barnet Fair. They came in char-à-bancs with four horses and a cornettist on the box. They came in two-wheeled carts pulled by magnificent donkeys caparisoned in yellow leather and shining brass. They came on bicycles and on foot. All the roads from London, through Tottenham and Highgate and Cricklewood, were dense with droves of horses and cattle. All the great shows of southeastern England, the roundabouts and booths of marvels, came together here. For Barnet Fair was not only a horse mart and a pleasure gathering, it was held on an ideal spot beside the Great North Road. It was indeed the site of a yet greater gathering of men and horses where the formidable Earl of Warwick, the king-maker, the apotheosis of all the political bosses in history, hurled his forces against the shrewd and able Tudor and was borne back to disaster over the brow of the hill, and slain by the edge of Hadley Wood.

The Fair was held on this spot, a field of gentle slope from the great highway, served by taverns of varying dignity and pretentiousness and overlooked, as by an acropolis, by the ancient town of High Barnet. The Saxon church tower on the hill yet bore the huge iron receptacle wherein the beacon fires were lighted to send grave tidings forward from London. Down this same high road came another

king-maker later on—George Monk, the astute and magnetic creature who stopped his army by Friern Barnet and let the news of it leak through to Westminster while his men drank Haythorne's Ales and sang unmelodious songs round their camp fires on the heath. Across that same heath now rumbled the cockney brakes and char-à-bancs, the heads of the pleasurers high among the branches arching the lanes and the thin penetrating quavers of the cornets dying away across the mist-clad fields and desolate wolds toward Hendon or flaring into triumphant clamour as the vehicles pulled up for a drink at the tavern at Tally-ho Corner.

It was the second evening of the Fair that Hazel, escaping from Mrs. Salisbury's, walked over to the Great North Road with Lizzie Kitching and Cicely Giffel. Cicely was developing into a slim, neatly made girl of unusual poise and reticences. She had an air of being always swiftly going somewhere and she was given to sudden gusts of laughter behind her hand. Cicely had freckless all over her—not great reddish blotches of sinister aspect, but tiny flecks of pale amber loveliness that were not immediately apparent, as though she had been gilded in some previous incarnation and traces of it remained. She was slim, yet Hazel noted that there was a good deal of her to put one's arm about, and Hazel retained, too, amid the chaotic memories of that night, a clear vision of Cicely's dark blue eyes filmed with ecstasy and her mouth slack with desire.

There was a barracks at Barnet, and as the sun went down behind Elstree and Mill Hill, the three girls reached the great mass of people surging to and fro across the North Road. The Fair Grounds were crowded. They could see the bright-red coats of the soldiers, tall creatures with fascinating little pill-box hats fastened to one side of their oiled heads with the black chin straps, their foreheads decorated with wonderful "quiffs" of sleek hair. They were tough young men, those soldiers, and they strutted and strolled about in a very haughty way, their canes slapping sharply against their prominent calves, as though they were difficult to please. As they were, for Hazel could hear them commenting upon the girls as they passed. Hazel and Cicely and Lizzie were waiting to go on a roundabout, the steam organ was squealing "Two Lovely Black Eyes," and as the riders swept round in the last delirious circuit, their skirts flying recklessly and their faces flushed with the sensation of speed, the soldiers passed remarks upon them.

"Gor lummy, Bill, see them sharves? Why, talk about understandin's! Woa! My beauty! See 'er shy, George. Nice filly that. Hoi!" And the youthful warrior, pursing up his lips, uttered a low yet penetrating sound that, in those days, was an understood signal between men and maids. He saw the girl dismount and, putting her hair from her eyes, run away laughing, and he led his comrades in pursuit.

The three girls from Haythorne Terrace were not

so bold. It was only the extreme glamour of a colour sergeant's uniform, a splendid personage with a bronzed face and fine moustache ("just 'ome from Egypt," he told them), that induced them to accept his invitation to "see the sights." He presented them magnificently to two corporals, also "'ome from Egypt," he told Hazel; he wouldn't bother himself with rookies, and together they passed slowly, in échelon, through the crowd. The two corporals, with their one shilling and fourpence a day, would have been reluctant to escort two such obviously respectable girls had they not received a special extra fourpence a day for foreign service. The colour sergeant, of course, got his six shillings and was wealthy. It was he who suggested the first visit to the bar parlour of the Red Lion. They were watching a Negro dodging the hardwood balls that drovers were hurling at him with uncertain aim.

"Come on, Tommy, are ye rooted?" he demanded of one of the corporals. "Let's all go up to the Lion. My treat, girls. My treat, my dear. Ever been to the Fair before?" and he drew Hazel's hand through his arm.

He was very dazzling. He had the most lovely flags sewn on his scarlet sleeves, he had the South African and the Soudan medals on his great bulging bosom, and he was really good-looking in a military way, even if his breath did smell strongly of ale. They went slowly up the hill, the sounds of the Fair coming to them over the tents—the boom of the an-

nunciating drums, the rattle of the rifles on the ranges, the squeal and snuffle of the steam organs, the high shrill note of the warning bugles, the thump and whine of the strength-testing machines, the soft sough and sputter of the naphtha flares in front of the whelk stalls, the steady scuff of many feet.

And then Hazel, sitting on a red-plush seat in the crowded bar parlour of the Red Lion, had her first glass of port. The colour sergeant standing by the bar passed it over to her and then brought his own glass of beer and sat down. "Well, ladies and gentlemen," he remarked amiably, "here's to them that likes it, and those that don't like it, they can lump it. To our better acquaintance." And with one superb swallow he set the glass down empty.

And Hazel, unused to the hot huddle of an alcoholic crowd, delighted and bewildered by the bright yellow gaslight, the gleaming glass and pewter, the popping of corks, the strained curious expressions on the faces of the three pretty barmaids, the low-beamed ceiling, black with the smoke and air of a hundred years, sat with the glass of port beneath her nose, watching and watching and absorbing it in great gasps.

"Why, blow me, 'Arry," said the colour sergeant to one of the corporals. "Blow me if this young lady ain't afraid of a little drop o' port. It'll do you good, my dear. That's it. Puts heart into you. My old mother always gave us port wine with an egg beat up when we was sick."

"Where was that?" asked Hazel, sipping.

"Down in 'Erefordshire, where I come from," said he. "I'm a West-country man, I am."

"That's where we come from too," said Hazel.

The colour sergeant went to the bar and put down his glass to be filled again. Then he returned to Hazel's side.

"That's what we might call a coin*ci*dence," he said, accenting the third syllable. "Fancy us two meetin' 'ere an' both from the West country! And do you ever go back 'Erefordshire way?"

"I haven't. Perhaps next summer I shall."

"Nor me. Somehow, after servin' foreign, you don't want to. Now here's me, not long 'ome from Egypt. You'd think we was 'alf out of our minds to stay 'ome. Yet we're just the blokes as go right out to India."

"Perhaps you'll save a princess or get an idol with a diamond in its forehead," suggested Hazel.

"More likely get a bullet in me own forehead," muttered the colour sergeant. "Or a touch o' dysentery." And he reflected a moment, rubbing his big shining red jaw. He brightened as his glass came to him refilled. "S'pose we try a turn o' the shows, eh? My word, them two young fellows o' mine are goin' strong," he added facetiously, for Cicely and Lizzie were sitting in front of glasses of port while their swains drank stolidly at their beer.

"Cheer up, we aren't dead yet," said the colour sergeant. "Let's have another round. 'Ere's to the

gel as talks the most and is the last to be kissed. Now, boys!"

It was not long before the ice was really broken and the three couples began to have a good time. They had some more port, and Hazel experienced that supreme feeling of completed vitality that suffuses the young with their first encounter with wine. It was quite different from the furtive tastes she had stolen from the bottle of port her father drank. She laughed as they went down the street again. She even danced a little and, greatly daring, took the colour sergeant's arm.

"That's the style!" he said approvingly. "They say you can always tell a Barnet girl, but you can't tell her much."

And soon Hazel was sitting sideways upon a worn red-leather saddle, grasping the pommels and staring ecstatically between the sharply pricked ears of a dappled gray palfrey. The steam whistle shrilled, the engine hissed, and with a great blare of metallic music the huge contraption began to revolve, while up and down on a rod that passed through his spine and belly, Hazel's steed rose and fell in deliriously beautiful motion. The girls gave themselves up to the sheer sensuous delight of the thing. They felt they were flying on wings. They laughed and screamed, their clothes flaring to their chins, their hair in their eyes, their mouths wide like corybants leaping in a dance. And as the speed gradually diminished they felt as though they were in a swoon

of exquisite pleasures. There was neither past nor future, body nor soul, only a divine fusion of their beings in sound and colour and motion. Hazel felt herself toppling into space as the whistle blew and the colour sergeant's powerful arms lifted her gently to the ground. For a moment she hid her face; he took her arm and led her away from the harsh brilliance of the lights. She heard her companion comforting her in his hearty way.

"You'll be all right in a tick," he growled, "then we'll try the switchback."

"Oh, no, please!" she protested. "Let's go back to the Red Lion. And I'd like some more wine, if you don't mind."

The sergeant stared at her and then gave his calf a cut with his cane.

"Well, blow me pink if you ain't a proper little sportsman! The very thing I'd like to do meself. So here we go. We'll have a drop of fine old sherry." He led the way up the hill again and together they entered the Red Lion's bar parlour.

"I want you to tell me something," said Hazel.

The colour sergeant smiled and smoothed his moustache.

"I never refuse a lady anything," he replied gallantly.

She watched him through her large glasses, her brain still a little dizzy from the roundabout.

"I'd like to know your name," she said in a small, high voice. "Mine's Hazel Heath."

The sergant stared at her. Something in the pitch and timbre of the girl's voice called to him. He heard his mother's musical tones as she called across the village green at home, the voices of his sisters in the hayfields and the deep lanes of his native shire.

"Didn't I mention it?" he muttered. "Colour Sergeant Joseph Crowther, at your service."

"Mother has Crowther blood," said Hazel.

"You seem to know a lot, my dear."

She smiled saucily into his eyes.

"More than I'd ever tell you," she said. "What about my wine?"

They went home arm-in-arm under the great elms of Friern Lane singing sleepily the tune of the roundabout:

"Two lovely black eyes!
Oh, what a surprise!"

And as Hazel tumbled into her bed beside Lena that young lady awoke and blinked into the lamplight.

"What have you been doing?" she murmured.

"Sowing a wild oat," said Hazel and fell into a forty-fathom slumber.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Louis and Francis had been about a year at Farquharson's, it seemed to the former that he was suddenly at large in a world of girls. He emerged from a period of difficulty with his voice, his clothes, and his spirit, into a region where he discovered that he was, apparently, graciously tolerated.

It must be admitted at once that he did not attain to this without losing some of his illusions. Swayne perhaps contributed in a small measure, but Señor Bustillo, who lived at Hampstead, was a man of very different attainments. In the first place he was a Costaraguan who had been educated in his native San Benito and at Paris. He became very fond of the young man from Rouen, and invited him to his home, which was about halfway up Parliament Hill, a substantial suburban home of the old style, full of mahogany furniture and Turkey rugs, with steel engravings of Claude Duval, and Meissonier duellists, lunging at each other over massive chiffoniers loaded with silver. In this house Louis was introduced to company novel indeed to him, but common enough in the neighbourhood. Old Mrs. Bustillo, who was a white-haired, eagle-nosed old lady with skin like

parchment, was the head of a household of young people who adored her and ignored her at the same time. They called her "the mother superior" and were amused at her dislike of modern ways. The fact was, Mrs. Bustillo's youth was preserved for her by her years in Costaragua. She married the elder Bustillo when he was Consul General in London in 1860 and she returned with him to his own country. She had a number of children and she sent them to school in England where in most cases they married and remained. Now that her husband was dead she was come home herself, filling the house with grandchildren and nephews and nieces, so that Mr. Bustillo, Jr., her youngest and the only one whose eyes were fixed upon Costaragua as the scene of his future activities, occupied a position of some splendour as a youthful uncle without the usual responsibility of that office. He described himself to Louis, as they ascended Parliament Hill, as "a minister without portfolio."

"My mother surrounds herself with young people who scandalize her," he remarked, his enormous dark eyes glowing like lamps, and his small precise mouth revealing extremely white teeth as he smiled. "She retains me as evidence that the old-fashioned person still exists. I can assure you that being in business as an example is at times embarrassing. But my mother will like you."

She did. Louis was aware that he was not entirely objectionable; but the clear consciousness

that his personality was loved by women, just as they themselves inspired in him incalculable emotions, came later, in the distant capital of San Benito. And so it was not to be expected that he should comprehend the more subtle and obscure attraction he had for older women. The only feeling he experienced with any conviction was that by some fluke of fortune he had entered into a realm of delightful beings who permitted him to adore them. Without concluding that he possessed any power or virtue in the matter, Louis was disposed to accept the shining gifts, and puzzled very little over old Mrs. Bustillo's illogical outbursts against the flightiness of girls nowadays, which usually followed her confidential accounts of the times she used to have in Costaragua. The latter were of immense value to the young man, for they touched his imagination. He drew from her words pictures of a highly civilized society embedded in a nation of inarticulate peasants, and carrying on their alluring existence against a background of snow-capped mountains, brilliant tropical forests and volcanoes of notable eccentricity. There were actual pictures about the Parliament Hill house that expressed the externals of this life, but it was old Mrs. Bustillo herself, with her air of a good-humoured but banished empress, who embodied for Louis his conception of San Benito society, remote, gay, and deliciously foreign.

And in the crowd of pretty and, if not pretty,

vivacious young ladies, it was some time before Louis discovered Eudoxia. She was the younger daughter of Señor Bustillo's eldest sister, a slim, athletic brunette with gray-black eyes that were illumined by flashes of phosphorescent intensity. She gave him one of those flashes straight in the eye one evening as the company were preparing to depart, and Louis, after she had left the room to get her things, spoke of her to old Mrs. Bustillo.

"Ask her yourself," retorted the old lady. "Why, in my time the young man wouldn't let a girl like that go home by herself. You are all cold, calculating salary-getters nowadays."

"I will ask to see her home, then," said Louis.

Eudoxia permitted it. She lived with her parents at St. John's Wood, and the brief journey by the District Railway was productive of a daring invitation from Louis to take lunch with him the following Saturday in the West End and to go a matinée. Eudoxia had done this often enough, for she was twenty years old, and the importance of the episode was that it definitely launched Louis upon a career of love-making entirely extraneous from his life at Barnet. It brought him into touch, moreover, with a society curiously different from the family life of the Strikers. The Bustillos, their relatives and friends, had just as much money as the Strikers, but they possessed a hard brilliance, a suspicion of oriental showiness that marked them subtly yet indisputably as less genteel than the people at the Lodge. Louis

was sensitive to these things without being able to define them. He was even aware of Hazel Heath's superiority in this respect to Eudoxia Bustillo, but he felt more at home, more himself with Eudoxia than with Hazel. Behind the latter's elfin charm and acute intelligence, he sensed the invisible prestige of the indigenous race. Yet, baffling to his adolescent mind was the utterly English outlook and severe conservatism of the Hampstead people. They comprised families with disconcerting names like Salmon and Neiderheitfeld, Ehrenstein and Bustillo; they were Hebrews and Latins and Slavs; too proud to change their patronymics to cheap and facile anglicisms, and oblivious of the heavier and slower aborigines.

He realized this singular divergence most acutely when Francis also dined at the Bustillos'. That young man's natural gravity of demeanour was emphasized by his formidable physical presence. His habits were those of an athletic hermit. He had joined a West End boxing club, and he frequently appeared at church on Sunday morning with a black eye or a strip of court-plaster on his cheek. He played Rugby football, centre forward, in one of the most belligerent clubs in London; and when he went out to dinner he made absolutely no remarks beyond the irreducible minimum imposed by courtesy. Old Mrs. Bustillo regarded him with humorous perplexity. She was shrewd enough to know he was a mere tongue-tied lout, but her quick mind and long

acquaintance with the delicate pleasures of Latin gallantry resented his imperturbable aplomb.

"His poise is admirable—*avoirdupois*," she was heard to murmur and her son, who had invited Francis, and who heard the murmur, retorted with a native proverb to the effect that when there was water in the river it made no noise.

"Ah, *sí, sí!*" replied the old lady in a most musical voice. "But young ascetics do not delight me. I would rather see him take a glass of wine."

"Well, Mother, he dislikes it, so there is nothing to be done."

What went on behind the strong ruddy face that Francis Striker turned upon the world puzzled others besides Mrs. Bustillo. He came, of course, from a family singularly free from grossness. Without any presumptuousness and embarrassing prudery, the Strikers were all very much what is unfortunately described as "clean-minded." Francis, more even than his kin, appeared oblivious of the troubled waters of sex. He never spoke of it even to Louis and he preserved an air of virginal sanctity enfolded in the charm of unconscious breeding. The sudden surges and idiocies of callow youth were apparently beyond his horizon. His preoccupation with athletic efficiency and his dogged attention to his work created in the minds of young men and girls a sentiment of respectful irritation. In a sense he was abnormal, for most youths of his habits were offensively and robustly pious. Francis went to church, but he

was not pious. To Mrs. Bustillo Francis was a portent. Her conception of a young man was not so far from the average: he was a being who was instantly susceptible to feminine charm, in whose candid eyes she could detect the incipient aura of love. He was a being whom women inspired with passion and informed with folly and courage and despair. He exploded into tremendous exploits; he made love irresistibly and delightfully; he was the raw material out of which excellent husbands were fashioned. Francis was none of these things. He was, according to Eudoxia, a stick, while more than one frequenter of the Parliament Hill house referred to him as "that beefy blighter."

Francis cared little. His real ambitions were maturing in the warm darkness beneath the visible conventions of the industrious apprentice. He made no more than a sort of growling comment upon Louis and his inevitable development into an appendage to various girls. What affected Francis much more seriously was the development of his friend's character in general. Louis became extremely fashionable in his dress. He oiled his hair and parted it in the middle, and he assumed a decidedly nonchalant négligé air when addressed upon general subjects. He contracted the habit of "going up the River," which, in the set of athletic men Francis liked, was regarded as a pitiable effeminacy. To spend a Saturday afternoon in a punt poling it along between the verdurous banks of the Upper

Thames, while an exquisite young thing in pink furbelows reclined on cushions in the stern under a ravishing parasol, was no pastime for a healthy man, in the opinion of Francis. Louis was in danger, as rapidly did he adopt the code and standards of the "Bustillo crew," as Francis called them, of becoming almost ineffably perfect and earning his friend's contempt.

Both of them, in fact, were at a very difficult and dangerous period of their respective developments —a period when outside influences of the will are at their lowest ebb and when their visions of the future, of their own natures, were darkened and obscured by the imminence of experience. It is the period when young men know everything and nothing, when lofty and terrible ideals haunt the inner chambers of the soul. What held Francis back from the contempt he might have conceived for Louis was affection and also a knowledge of his own insecurity. Unknown to any one of his people, and even to the curious mind of Swayne, Francis had been on the brink of disaster. It had happened so swiftly that he was on that brink before he realized the position at all. He had been to the National Sporting Club and was sitting in a hansom, waiting for a boxing friend, and thinking with quiet enjoyment of the splendid work he had just seen, when a woman, beautifully gowned, came over and got in beside him. At first he imagined she had mistaken the cab to be empty, and exclaimed:

"Oh, I say! I beg your pardon! I'm waiting for a friend, you know."

He then had a strange and unforgettable experience. Putting up her magnificent bare white arm, so that the perfume of her corsage assailed his nostrils, and the sight of her delicious and insolent features just beyond the arm made him suddenly dizzy, she thrust open the little trapdoor above their heads, and to the red and dissipated old face that peered down upon them, she drawled musically:

"All right, Cabby. Two-twenty B, Sydney Street."

For a moment after the trap closed and they were trotting through the darkness she kept her arm up and regarded him with amusement. He was puzzled as well as dizzy. Why did this glorious creature of the Alhambra half-world drop on him of all people? He never glanced at them. Yet here he was, trapped. And he had nothing to say to her. He could leap out of the cab, after grasping the reins and pulling up the horse. But he did not. He just sat looking at her, ravished by the saucy beauty of her, the heavily marked brows, the sweet cynical line of her carmined mouth, the pulsing and delicate roundness of her throat. She lowered her arm and it lay across his shoulders. Francis seemed to himself to be turned to stone while retaining the power to feel. Sparks danced before his eyes. He was horribly afraid and dismally ashamed of his fears. He heard this woman laugh and say in his ear, in a soft, hoarse voice:

"You'll see me home, won't you, darling? I'm stony to-night, and my boy's at Doncaster. Chances are he won't be flush either when he gets back from the races. I say, is your hair natural? Does it curl really?" Her fingers touched the hair that grew in tight whorls behind his ears. "I must say I thought that Peckham Bantam was going to show up a little better than that. Three thick 'uns I put on him, and he won't be out of the hospital for a week."

"Did you really back him?" said Francis at last. "He's been wining, you know."

"Well, I didn't know, or I shouldn't have lost my money." She put her other hand over and felt his biceps. "Are you one of the fancy?" she asked with admiration. "I love bruisers."

"Only in an amateur way," said Francis, feeling very much embarrassed. "I box a little," he added in a small, hollow voice. He looked out of the window, dreadfully aware all the time of her arm against his neck, the close scrutiny of her charming insolent eyes, the languorous perfume of her person. He had to wink to keep his eyes clear. Even then everything was blurred. What had she said? Sydney Street. He had no idea of the direction. It sounded to him like a slum. They had such names, he reflected uneasily.

And even when she drew her arm away he remained frightened. He was aware of her sitting quietly in the corner of the hansom, not touching him at all, busily drawing on the long, white voluptuous

gloves of her class. He was frightened because his training had included no equipment for dealing with a situation of this kind save by flight, and he was afraid of his dignity if he fled. He could not desert her now, so subtle was the chivalric appeal. There was a curiosity too, rearing its head within him, assuming the guise of a monstrous sin—just to know for himself what it amounted to. Combating this was a violent physical revulsion from the almost brutal assault she made upon his senses. He felt outraged by her bold beauty, her nonchalant assurance that he was like other men—a crude beast. It was almost, to his young and secular mind, as though she were carrying him away captive to a region of sweet yet terrible ecstasies, carrying him with such consummate ease that he was powerless to escape.

The hansom fled swiftly southwestward; the hoofbeats of the horse and the faint whirr of the wheels were the only sounds as the Brompton Oratory rose on their right, a sombre and ominous shadow. Kensington? Francis knew this part of town. He had spent days in the museum galleries, for the study of machinery models was a passion with him. But soon they were in the Fulham Road and had turned toward the River.

"I must say," complained the girl, without looking at him, "you aren't very entertaining. I'm not taking you out of your way, am I?"

"I don't live in town," said Francis.

"Don't live in town? Well, I never. You're at a hotel, then."

"No, I live with my people," he informed her stiffly.

She regarded him with bright, intelligent interest sharpened by the metallic perceptions of a woman who lives upon the appetities of men.

"Tell me, dearie," she said as the cab slowly drew up before a terrace of respectable houses, "are you —— Here we are!" she exclaimed, and got out at once. Francis followed and found the money for the fare. For a moment he debated whether he should tell the man to wait, but the driver himself, looking down with an expression of astute understanding, made Francis dismiss him abruptly.

The girl was fitting a long bright key into the door as he reached the step, and at once she beckoned him to follow.

"Excuse me," he mumbled, lifting his hat. Suddenly, as he was about to start off, she stepped toward him and took a firm hold of his arm, drawing him into the dark hall. Francis did not resist, for it was something entirely new to his experience. He had grown up in the tradition that women of the lower classes, and especially women of whom one did not speak, were clinging, timorous creatures, existing furtively in the shadows of the world, thankful for some male to patronize them. This capable and nervously powerful grasp astounded him. It warned him of the existence of an unsuspected world where

women might be mistresses in something more than name. Good heavens! Breathing heavily, Francis found the door closed behind him and himself following the girl up a thick-carpeted stair.

Of what he was to see he had no clear image in his mind. To a youth like Francis, clean-living and emerging from a home of singular refinement and purity of tone, the home of a woman of the town was completely vague. If he had been faced with the necessity of describing it, he would have imagined it in a slum with surroundings of conventional squalor proper to sin.

"Come in, dearie; you don't need to be bashful," she said, and he followed her into a room where a cheerful wood fire burned in a grate with a brass fender. It was a relief to him, but he stood awkwardly, hat and stick in hand.

"I say, I think I'd better go, you know," he said in a low troubled tone. "It's rather late.

"Sit down! I'll get you a drink in a minute. I have some port wine I can recommend."

"Thanks. I never touch wine."

He did not understand her silence. She went into her bedroom, leaving the door wide open, to take off her cape and smart little bonnet. She did not reply because she was a woman who lived so exclusively within range of men's passions that the irrelevant and ephemeral asceticisms of a stray youth like Francis had no interest for her. She had come to certain conclusions while driving home. He was very green

and possibly very well off, and this combination was in no way agreeable to her. In the Leicester Lounge she would often say to her friends that she detested milksops, the point being that some of those friends specialized in milksops by appealing to their pity and chivalry. This particular woman could not do it, and it was due to this dour streak in her character that she made so profound an impression upon Francis.

She came back into the room, her arms and shoulders very white and bare, and sailing up to him, pulled his face down to her roughly and kissed him. He blushed painfully, and winced as she took his lips in her thumb and finger and pinched them. "You're the shyest boy," she said, chuckling as she went to the sideboard and brought out a decanter and glasses. "Now you must try my port. My boy got it at Short's just after the Oaks last year." She laughed.

Francis stood, an odd gigantic figure in evening dress, trembling like a leaf. Perspiration was running down his temples. He looked round nervously and made a faint move toward the door. He became suddenly aware she was looking at him over her shoulder, an expression of cold animosity in her eyes.

"Well!" she said, and she turned with a bottle in either hand, her eyes flashing dangerously.

"It's very late," he repeated sullenly. "I think I ought to go."

She put the bottles down on the table with a bang, strode over to the door and dragged it open, and then she pointed.

"Sling your hook!" she said harshly. "Clear out! I don't ask anybody to stop who don't want to. You did me a good turn and I wanted to return the compliment. Wait!" She ran into the bedroom and came back with a couple of half-crowns in her hand. "Here's the fare. Thank Gawd, there's always something in the stocking."

"I didn't mean——" said Francis.

"Sling your hook!" she insisted. "I've had enough of it. There's your money," she threw the coins down the stair. "Go after it. Shut the door when you go out. Your mother's no business to let you out at night."

And she closed the door of her room with a bang.

This episode, so brief, so apparently futile and humiliating, for Francis missed the last train at King's Cross and had to take a tram and then walk four miles, was destined to make a profound impression upon his mind. It made him conscious of his own weakness under temptation because, had the girl been one of those who possess the fatal gift of softness and seductive lure at the critical moment, Francis was appalled by the conviction that he would have remained. He was appalled because continence was to him a concrete and valuable thing. He possessed a conception of virtue and power enshrined in a temple of exquisite and delicate chastity.

His imagination was preoccupied, not with sensuous images so much as with the rudiments of an obscure desire for sovereignty. Beyond the immediate and orderly world of his daily life there lay for him enormous veiled regions where, in spite of his inbred modesty of soul, he deemed himself the inheritor of power.

But with Louis Chaillu the case was different, though it might be said that he too had dreams of conquest over shadowy empires. With him, however, those empires were sensuous and illumined by the heat and smoke and lightning of sex. His visions were of marvellous women, of great inspirations and heroic sacrifices. He saw himself a celebrated poet for whom women were eager to immolate themselves upon the altar of worship. He built up, behind the frail and ephemeral affairs with girls like Eudoxia, an elaborate legend of an unknown creature of rare beauty and intellect, who sent him delicious communications. He spent voluptuous hours imagining the face and form of this Egeria; he designed his responses and derived a pleasure almost physical in its poignancy in imagining the ultimate encounter and passion. The myriads of books he read, while Francis scarcely was aware of the existence of romances, fed the strong, hot flame of his fancy. His daily work, though it might be essentially a matter of figurings and preoccupation with the materials of construction, with the qualities of earth and metals, and the strength of beams beneath

grave loads, was irradiated for him because he nursed the fancy of a sphere in a distant land; a land where, by a charming anomaly, that same brilliant creature was waiting for him amid tropical splendours. And indeed he found much at Hampstead to feed this legend too, for there all the talk, once it left the immediate social mill, was of Costaragua, its past and present and future. Old Mrs. Bustillo would sit enthroned in that sombre Victorian room looking out upon the steep and exemplary thoroughfare of the Parliament Hill Road, the virile old face working beneath the skin like freckled parchment, and tell Louis marvellous tales of her life in that country beyond the warm volcanic oceans of the Americas. She told him because he of all the younger ones who came would sit and listen, and because he was handsome and she enjoyed watching the soft golden hairs of his little moustache glisten in the lamplight. Letters would arrive, which she would read to him in translation and with digressions to explain the content. He would listen, holding the large thin envelope with the fine flourishing penmanship. The name and title of the old lady fascinated him, caught his imagination. *La Señora Doña Ambrosina Fairchild de Bustillo.* What a gorgeous and sumptuous salutation!

"You must go there!" she would say, folding up the transparent sheets, and he would nod dreamily but without conviction, for he had no second sight at all, and his future was in a yet unidentified para-

dise. But he drew one practical corollary from it, and she encouraged him.

"Of course, you must learn Spanish," she retorted. "Begin to-morrow. Or rather, I will give you a lesson now."

She did. He understood the broad lines of it, with some suspicion of the mentality behind it, before he went home. She had learned Spanish herself with agony and tears, alone and half desperate in an empty yet ancient land, with a busy and irritable husband to alternate tuition with objurgation. And one day she read Louis a letter in parts that captured his imagination very completely, for he thought he saw in the writer some semblance of the enchantress who ruled the kingdom of his dreams.

"You ask me, my darling aunt, if I am in love and I reply to you that I do not know. There are times when I feel entirely cold and despise men so strongly I could dispense with them all. Yet that is certainly not true, for I am compelled to admit some of them have charming dispositions. Yet how vain, how easily convinced of their nobility and justice they are! I speak only in generalities, of course—

"Which means," said Mrs. Bustillo, rubbing her long sallow nose, "that the man himself who has inspired all this fine stuff, is sitting in the *patio* at that moment!

"—but it is impossible not to observe their diverting behaviour if one ventures to reveal the slightest interest in their destinies. They imagine immediately that one is dying of a secret passion for them and sometimes presume insufferably and make it necessary to be cruel.

"The minx!" interjected Mrs. Bustillo.

"Sometimes, however, a man will show real delicacy of feeling. As you know, dearest aunt, I have long had a sentiment of an amiable nature toward a certain person in Albatorre, and we correspond, though as I have already told you, I am not convinced that I really love. Nevertheless, I think of him and am never so happy as when I can spend an hour in the company of some other person of the male sex and compare them silently in my mind. Only the other day a gentleman who has been visiting us here (he has come to Costaragua to sell pianos, forgetting that he must first import performers) has done me the honour to declare his affection for me. He is most intellectual, and likes nothing so much as to read to me selections from books which he, in his masculine superiority, deems above the average in beauty and wit. I permit him to do this, gaining from him much praise for my intelligence as I sit, thinking of a certain person. Is this love? I am unable to decide. I fear I have no heart.

"Humph!" said Mrs. Bustillo, feeling for her marvellously fine Irish linen handkerchief.

"I am too conscious all the time that the gentleman is not considering *my* happiness at all. If I am pensive he imagines I am in love with him and assumes an air so excessively proprietary, so comically *sympática* that I burst out laughing, when he becomes furious and despondent, wishes to leave me, and when I give him permission stays on later than ever, so that I have to yawn my head off to hint that even if he thinks me an angel I need some sleep.

"Yet I feel I could love a man, if I could only find one who combined a sense of humour with a lack of vanity. Is there such a being? Not in Costaragua. And if the person of whom I am speaking is an example from Europe, I fear I shall live and die an old maid. Perhaps I am too fastidious and seek what they call in the English novels you send me, a Prince Charming. Life is so dull here at times."

"Who is that fellow at Albatorre?" asked Louis.

"A perfect fool," responded old Mrs. Bustillo with vigour, "with an unfortunate facility for pretty phrases. A journalist with a pompadour and an ivory complexion. He has a reputation among the young ladies of being an ascetic and a recluse and they dream of happiness in his arms. He manages this by being extraordinarily discreet in his affairs. I call him a fool because he combines stupidity with a sort of surly cunning. I knew his father, who was exactly the same sort of man. He is too lazy to have a passion and not sufficiently imaginative to remain chaste."

"Please go on, Mrs. Bustillo," said Louis.

"Where was I? Oh!

"So dull here at times. But from what I hear, if Señor Orlando Perkins keeps his promise, we shall have plenty of excitement. The railway is actually to be built! Think of it, my dearest aunt! Instead of two days in an oxcart and a week on that terrible Curcubion River in a canoe, devoured by flies and dead with fatigue, from San Benito to the Coast, we are to travel *de luxe*. So they say. It all depends upon Señor Perkins's new idea of bringing in an army of Chinese to do the work. Uncle Umberto says the Government will never consent. All the first families are opposed to the railway, he thinks, since it will destroy the seclusion and peace of San Benito. But you know Uncle Umberto.

"He lost his ears as a youth in the army of the Liberator," explained Mrs. Bustillo.

"You mean—deaf?" said Louis.

"No, cut off with a sabre!" retorted the old lady.

"He is a remarkable person. He has written his memoirs: mostly imaginary, if you ask me. A regular old musty-minded reactionary, but a fine man in his day. You should hear him about Bolívar. Most scandalous and most amusing."

"The railway will be made, then?" said Louis.

"Oh, who knows? Anastasia and all the young people are for it, of course. But Chinese——! You do not know Costaragua. The peasants are already half Negro, half Indian. What sort of horror would a populace be of these mixed with Chinese?

"I think I like Anastasia," Louis remarked thoughtfully.

"A minx, but perhaps—yes, none the worse for that," mumbled Mrs. Bustillo.

"I do not understand that word," returned Louis with a charming candour that made the old lady want to take his face in her hands and kiss his mouth.

"No?" she said in delight. "Well, you will, my poor infant. The world is full of them."

"Coquettes?" suggested Louis.

"M-m-m. Not quite. Not quite."

"I do not like them," he added parenthetically.

"You should. They are good for you."

"But why should I like girls who are not nice to me?" he queried.

"Oh-ho!" crowed the old lady. "Why should his majesty be bothered with such tiresome creatures? You pasha! You want to sit on a divan and have

a lot of india-rubbery hussies tying themselves into loveknots in front of you, don't you?"

"Oh, no!" protested Louis, blushing furiously.

"Yes, you do! All men do. I know them, the vain wretches. Anastasia is right there. Yes, my dear?" she said to her son, who came up at this moment.

"I am commanded to inform you, *mamasita*, that the assembled company await your presence at supper."

"Coming," she replied, holding out her hand to Louis with a tough old smile. "Child," she whispered as they moved slowly toward the dining room, "Child, you have to remember this. The women who are worth anything at all in this world are the ones who are the most troublesome to manage. *That* for your tame cats! Be ruthless. We like it."

"No!" said Louis in astonishment and profound protest.

"Yes!" she asserted as they reached the dining-room door. "We like it. Try it and see."

And she smiled grimly to herself as she sailed in. She knew that would never be his métier.

CHAPTER X

SEVERAL things happened in South Barnet the following spring. In the first place, there were built four new houses on the new road that had lain like the site of an old Roman encampment, beneath a shroud of grass, between the Lodge and the High Road. And Mrs. Giffel moved into Number Two. They were large houses, three stories of brick with gardens and back entrances, and of course Mrs. Giffel was simply enlarging her business of taking boarders. So many clerks and school teachers had nowhere to live.

"I don't pretend to give them a home from home," she vociferated to Miss Culvert. "Most of them have had all the home they want. But if they like a second helping of marmalade, they don't find *me* in a state of mental and physical collapse. And I sweep under the beds. So they come."

They did, and Mrs. Giffel, engaging a servant with a squint and a passion for work, was able to devote more time to what she called "press work." Soon she had neighbours. Number One Haythorne Villas was suddenly invested by three pantechnicon vans filled and festooned with the belongings of a family named Sewell. The Sewells came from Lewisham

which, so Mrs. Sewell told Mrs. Giffel, was relaxing and didn't suit the family.

Mrs. Sewell was difficult to describe without giving way to intemperate caricature. She was stout and red and she drank a great deal of malt liquor and (secretly) gin. The first tradesman noticed delivering goods was Dabney and Driscoll's dray with a cask of Dabney's Family Ale. She had a number of chins and no ankles, and she was not an entirely satisfactory neighbour because of her temper. She had an enormous family. Her husband, who appeared a week later, was a traveller for Spingarn's, the great department store in Tottenham Court Road, and was as far as possible the exact antithesis of his wife. He was a gentlemanly person, very tidy and correct in his dress, good company in all company, and evidently in good circumstances. They had six children besides a grown-up daughter who was Mrs. Sewell's by an earlier marriage. There was not a good-looking female in the whole seven of them, but they immediately became popular because Mrs. Giffel spread the news of their virtues, and they confirmed her opinion by their ability to entertain. The girls were thin and pale and freckled and apparently with as little charm as their enormous and rubicund mother, yet they never lacked boys to go with and the house was uproarious with the mirth born of comic songs without sense, and piano-strumming without end.

Another thing that happened worthy of remark

was Hazel's essay on the High Road corner. It came out in the local paper. But even the Heath family itself would not have noticed it had not Mrs. Giffel carried it into the house and roared it out. They peered at the initials H. M. H. at the end of the half column and blinked incredulously. Hazel? Hazel have something in the paper? Well, I never did! Also, My Word!

"It can't be good," said Katie, who was visiting. She was not malicious. She was honestly ashamed of her silly untidy young sister who was neither a beauty nor a home-loving girl. Hazel had about ten times the charm men desire that Katie had, but circumstances were against Katie perceiving it. She read the poor little piece and smiled in a superior manner, making no further comment.

"You'll be writing a poem next," said Miss Culvert.

"Or a novel!" said Katie pityingly. Katie had a lot of words to eat later on, when Hazel paid off a horrible mortgage on the house, a mortgage about to be foreclosed because Jack Hakin had lost his master's job and had to go mate for a while, so that there was no money to pay the interest. Mr. and Mrs. Hakin never openly admitted being wrong about Hazel. Even her name on books, on the railway bookstands, in newspapers and on hoardings, was inadequate to conquer their dour English suspicion of so questionable a source of income. They simply *couldn't* believe any of the Heaths had anything in

them. No attempt is being made to explain this. It is an insoluble portion of racial rock. The Hakins went on having children and debts, and Hazel went on writing novels that no reviewer would deign to notice even when they sold three hundred thousand copies. Hazel could have hired the reviewers as gardener's helpers and stable hands, but she could not induce them to read her books. Another insoluble portion. Hazel and the reviewers were both fundamentally English, and understood each other, just as did Mrs. Salisbury and Mr. Heath, eyeing each other over the rims of their tumblers in the back parlour. The words Katie had to eat later probably disagreed with her, but she ate them all the same.

The neighbourhood, in short, was being built up. Holly Park was no longer a park but a warren of suburban streets in outline with several houses in course of erection, and a number of people as rich as the Strikers were talking of going elsewhere to live. The place was becoming vulgar, they said, and the tradesmen in the High Road, bowing to the governess carts and landaus at the kerb, trembled. They were not gifted with sufficient vision to know that in a few years' time, when those same rich folk had actually departed and their estates had been scored with streets of tiny two-story villas, the business would be a hundred times bigger than any that an old dame with a pug dog and seventeen servants could supply. They could not anticipate the throngs of professional and business people who were trekking

out to North London because it was cheaper and more healthy for the children. They had no vision of the laundry hands and school teachers and factory operatives who were coming in a few years to pack their shops solid on Saturday evenings. They were like most tradesmen in England in those days—living from hand to mouth, oppressed by the outward garnitures of social prestige, and deriving their spiritual strength from the Methodist Chapel, whose visiting minister, Mr. King, was well qualified to keep them posted on the blessings of poverty, since they gave him a pound a week to keep his family of five from starvation. Nor did the tradesmen anticipate such people as Mr. and Mrs. Gifford with their son at Cambridge, if you please, and going into the Indian Civil Service at eight hundred a year to start. Old Mr. Gifford had lost his fortune and so had to live very quietly on a few hundreds, a feat easily accomplished at Number Three, Haythorne Villas. He was a tall old chap with charming manners and an entire inability to distinguish the social status of any one to whom he spoke. They kept a carriage at the livery stables and drove out majestically and genially on Saturday afternoons to visit their friends of yore at Sybil Fosters. He immediately contributed his lordly guinea toward the Cricket Club subscriptions, and would play at times, when the summer came, in a top-hat, his long legs astraddle, his bat up over his shoulder "like something out of 'Tom Brown's School Days,'" as the Reverend Arthur

Osborne, the curate, told the Strikers in great good humour. Mr. Gifford was rather a bore to some of the younger bloods because of his stories of the great games of the 'sixties between the various insurance offices and the stock exchange men, but he was always a good touch when it came to a subscription.

"Oh, of course, I'll manage a ten-pound note," he would say, and the young man would withdraw from the charming room, pinching himself to make sure it was not a dream. It was sometimes a little delayed, the delivery of that ten-pound note, whereas Mr. Sewell's ten shillings came out of his trousers pocket at once or not at all; but the style of the Giffords was a distinct acquisition to South Barnet. When Young Gifford did go to India, moreover, he took Lucia Striker with him as his bride. And nobody heard anything more about them. They sank imperceptibly into the great sea of Anglo-Indian life.

Thus the place grew, here and there, without any plan, formless and difficult to understand. On Sunday afternoons the young ladies and gentlemen playing tennis in the Strikers' garden could hear the ominous crepitation of the distant drum as the Salvation Army, with only a couple of red jerseys among them yet, marched down the terrible Smashem Street, where the toughest slum dwellers looked on from their doors and windows. On Saturdays the Neapolitan family with a green-baize-covered barrel organ showed their excellent teeth in

every street. Mr. Gifford sent out a shilling regularly, and Mrs. Giffel, who claimed that to her music was only an agreeable noise, would send out the dog she now found it advisable to keep in the house. *A che la morte* would cease abruptly in the middle of a bar, and there would be peace.

Schools sprang up in the outskirts owing to cheap rents and gravel soil—schools whose boys walked to St. Peter's in double file wearing mortar boards with red tassels, or green or blue. The schools were mostly kept by men who would not have been able to teach anything if they had known it. Strange foreign creatures, French masters, wretched young *bacheliers à lettres* from Paris and Blois, were to be seen for a while and then vanished, owing laundry bills. One of them nearly caused a cataclysm in Haythorne Terrace. Lillian Mills, of all people in the world, was seen walking with Monsieur Jeanmaire from Haythorne College. And she did it with that defiant air young girls adopt when they suddenly go forward, groping in the dark, to see what this business of life is, after all. Monsieur Jeanmaire could not have been a very entertaining companion, apart from his distinction as a foreigner. He was short, and his bullet head was covered with an upstanding brush of very unusual hair. His knowledge of English was something like Lillian's proficiency in French. Yet neither Miss Mills nor Miss Culvert could do anything with her for a fortnight. The glamour of having met a foreigner at a

dance, Monsieur Jeanmaire being engaged to play the fiddle at Miss Bellows's Dancing Class for Young Ladies, held Lillian to the point of an inexplicable obstinacy.

And then just as suddenly, she wouldn't speak to him. Strangely enough, it was Hazel, toiling away in the recesses of Mrs. Salisbury's shop, who got the facts. Hazel and Lillian became friends after they left school. Without having been at all aware of it, they had bonds of sympathy.

"I thought he was your boy for keeps," said Hazel over her shoulder as she rammed boxes back into place.

"No fear!" said Lillian, looking in a small mirror that advertised somebody's hairpins and examining the slow disappearance of those horrible pimples that made her life wretched. "No fear! I'm off!"

"Why, isn't he nice?"

Lillian shrugged her shoulders. Her face was certainly clearing. The fact made her comically haughty.

"I just got sick of it," she said, and added in a half whisper, "I don't like boys."

"You mean Frenchies," said Hazel.

"You had one, too," shot back Lillian, meaning Louis Chaillu.

"Oh!" said Hazel.

"Yes, oh!" mimicked Lillian. "Cleverdick you may be, but I saw you blush Sunday morning."

"It's different," said Hazel.

"Very likely. But it wasn't because he was foreign I chucked him," mused Lillian.

"Is he a minge?" asked Hazel, interested. "Minge" was local for stingy.

"That was one thing," admitted Lillian, emerging a little more from the chrysalis stage. "I didn't care to go on with it." She wrinkled her nose and conveyed in an indescribably subtle way to Hazel the impressions a not-very-clean or closely shaved male face had made upon her delicate senses. Hazel sniffed.

"I bet he looks funny in the mornings," she murmured cordially.

Lillian moved her right shoulder slightly in a way she had picked up from the younger Miss Bellows, and glanced at Hazel. Girls glanced in this fashion now, since that little essay had become known as having been written by Hazel. It is the only tribute a suburb can give to genius—a surly and suspicious glance. Once it was conceded that Hazel had not "pinched it out of a book," she had to submit to these occasional stealthy glances from her girl friends. From her mother and Mrs. Mills she had laconic comments upon precocious children, so that it was only in expansive moments like these that she let herself go and used that cool triumphant tone of the intellectual superior. Being superior in South Barnet was a perilous enterprise. There was a great deal of peasant blood in the people, and, as Mrs. Giffel said, "They might be slow to anger but

they were quick to take offence." Mrs. Giffel herself was regarded in some quarters with suspicion. As old Mrs. Hakin said, "What is the *use* of talking like that?" Nobody could answer.

The thrust about Louis Chaillu, however, penetrated Hazel's armour. It was a shrewd blow, since she had forgotten, temporarily, the incident mentioned by the observant Lillian. When that young lady had taken her departure, Hazel stood looking out of the door where a waterproof and a youth's suit twirled like gibbeted malefactors in a strong March wind, and running her fingernail along the brass yardstick in the counter, pondered upon the peculiar character of her emotions. She was unable to believe Louis Chaillu had ever met her that evening in the moonlight, he was so fine and fashionable a person now. He had grown much taller and had, also, in her imagination, withdrawn into a more elegant world. On Sunday morning outside the porch of St. Peter's Church, whither Hazel was gone with her father, Louis, with Miss Frances Selby on his arm, had raised his silk hat and bowed his handsome blond head toward her. And this had made a profound impression at the time upon Hazel because she was, even then, an impressionist artist. She was extraordinarily sensitive to obscure and romantic illusions. Miss Selby was, to most people, a common enough phenomenon—a girl with dark shining hair and blue eyes. But there was something in her air, her features, her carriage and dress, that caught

Hazel at that moment and transformed her from an individual to a type of dainty exclusiveness. She appeared, to the shabby little girl in glasses, as a symbol of social segregation. She appeared in a golden haze, as supernatural beings appeared to mediæval persons. And it was easy to invest Louis with the trappings of a demigod, seeing him with this radiant and seductive creature. Louis, indeed, seemed grown up, with his tail coat and lemon-kid gloves, while Hazel seemed to herself crushed into the earth by her shortness of stature and her apparently invincibly girlish body. Only her mind, escaping at times from the bondage of these illusions, warned her that this was not the case. And yet, so incalculable is the soul of a girl under the stress of development, that she would mutter, with tears in her eyes:

"Oh, I wish I was a man!"

And she meant it very much indeed. Perhaps she ought to have been. Perhaps it was an unintentional extra turn of the wheel of fate that deprived Mrs. Heath of the comfort of a boy in Hazel's place. How much more honour she would have gained in the world with a change of sex! It is possible even the reviewers would have been tractable; but it may be doubted if she would ever have been able to help her family in the same way.

Hazel, staring out between the nineteen-and-eleven-three mackintosh and the youth's suit at twenty-nine shillings, became preoccupied with the

immense distance she seemed to be getting from the important and beautiful things of life. The intimate and romantic connection between earning and spending had not yet formed part of her experience. She worked and gave the seven shillings each week to her mother. At noon on Saturday Mrs. Salisbury reluctantly parted with two half-crowns and a florin and at twelve-fifteen they reposed in Mrs. Heath's palm. Hazel merely performed the unexhilarating duty of carrying them home. This was the austere introduction she and most children of the poor received on the threshold of life, and it had the effect of neutralizing their emotions and hardening their moral fibre. There is nothing more salutary for children than a period in which despair acts like a preservative upon their faculties and retards the premature development of their secular desires.

For Hazel it seemed at this time that the magic casements were tightly closed and obscured with grime. Genius is by no means the bright, metallic, and stainless thing imagined by the unreflecting public. Nothing is more easily crushed or destroyed when young. Some people have called Hazel M. Heath, with her apparently inexhaustible stream of trashy love stories pouring forth from the press, not a genius but a public nuisance. A matter of opinion. The same thing is said of other universal purveyors to the multitude. But she had genius, nevertheless, and it suffered all the usual vicissitudes that

befall it in childhood. Sometimes, as she said, she had "spazzums in her mind," and saw sharp and clear the shining destiny ahead, and felt the pain of creation. But of late she was like a moth in the gutter, unable to drag her wings from the dreadful mire of daily life. When she went up to see her family and boys called after her with seductive whistles, she took no notice, but walked on with her head in the air instead of looking over her shoulder to lure them on. Cicely Giffel, who was receiving the tremendous attentions of Mr. Naseby, the cashier at the new bank on the Parade, no longer had time to go for delectable rambles with Hazel. Cicely had a talent for what the neighbourhood called music. She was a dexterous executant upon the piano, had secured several elementary diplomas from the Royal Academy of Music, and was able to play a large number of "pieces" with irreproachable technique and with the feeling of a penny-in-the-slot machine. This was Cicely's revenge upon society for making her practice hours and hours a day, and when her mother growled, "I wish you'd play something with a *tune* to it," Cicely would wrinkle up her nose and hoist her shoulders. Nothing could exceed the disdain all these young ladies conceived for their mothers. Miss Culvert was once injudicious enough to deplore Cicely's rage for hats and bonnets, observing that Mrs. Giffel did not buy intemperate quantities of such things. Cicely glanced at the remarkable contraption on her mother's head and

retorted, with considerable asperity for one with most of her life before her:

"Oh, I dessay! But Mother doesn't know how to put a bonnet *on!*"

Cicely's talent was now regarded as the charming accessory to Mr. Naseby's terrific bass voice. His rendering of "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep" would not have impressed a sailor. It was more suited to a diver, as a matter of fact, for when he reached the last note of the song he seemed to have gone to the bottom of the Atlantic without any intention of coming up again. He was a serious creature with a Napoleonic face, and he lost no time in cutting out Cicely from the riff-raff of Haythorne Terrace. A bank manager's wife is best away from childhood friends. Cicely hoisted her shoulders, but Mr. Naseby won his point. Hazel went for walks alone and puzzled the boys by having nothing to do with them. But they had abundance of entertainment with the younger Sewell girls next door to Mrs. Giffel, alarming and significant creatures without beauty or even plumpness, yet exhaling the charm men seek like musk or civet.

Sometimes Hazel passed the Lodge and looked in at the windows. She would be rewarded by a distant view of Mr. Striker's mutton-chop whiskers above his dress shirt, or of the Reverend Arthur Osborne, very clean and jolly and athletic, laying down the law to the ladies. Sometimes the forms of Mr. Albert and Mr. Nicholas, distant and uninterest-

ing grown-up creatures, were visible, or the huge presence of Francis, whom Hazel regarded with respect because Louis had spoken of him as the finest person in the world. But of Louis himself she did not see very much at this time. The reason was that Louis generally came home very late from the Bustillos at Hampstead. Hazel went for her solitary walks, serious and untroubled with thoughts of any lover. She felt a slight vertigo as she thought of the Kapellmeister's daughter and the duke. Louis, she was content to reflect, would marry some fine young lady like Frances Selby, a being of a brilliant and superior world, while she, grubby little draper's apprentice, would be found dead on her humble bed in the attic some day, the manuscript of a work of supreme genius held to her cold, emaciated bosom. That was all Hazel needed for bliss, and she developed the idea with the frightful gusto of youth. Almost before she realized what she was doing she was filling a number of pages in an exercise book. She bought a quire of what was called "sermon paper," and wrote on and on. She called it "Agatha's Victory," and at several points in its composition she cried. It was the day following its completion that Mrs. Salisbury smacked her face because she had answered a customer pertly. Mrs. Emory of all people. The butcher's wife was one of the few who really did obey the unwritten law of the suburbs, that forbids dealing out of your own district. Mrs. Emory never spent sevenpence on a

ticket to Finsbury Park to save sixpence on the price of a piece of material. And Hazel, just because Mrs. Emory had been uncertain about the exact shade she required in a jersey she was buying for her youngest, and after the counter was loaded with a toppling pile of boxes, all of which would have to be wearily repacked, thought she wouldn't decide after all to-day—Hazel had slammed a box lid down in a rage and muttered, with her lip all a-tremble.

"I wish you'd found that out before!"

There was nothing for it but for Mrs. Salisbury to move forward with the rapid lumbering gait of an infuriated rhinoceros, seize the girl by the arm, drag her into the obscurity of the back room, smack her face in an efficient and resounding manner, and fling her to one side. Mrs. Salisbury did this so quickly that she was able to forestall Mrs. Emory's angry comments upon Hazel's extraordinary lapse from the etiquette of servitude.

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Salisbury in a husky and breathless whisper, her large pink face aflame with emotion sternly repressed, "you'll understand the situation, Mrs. Emory. Me alone 'ere and obliged by ties o' friendship to 'old out a 'elping 'and, as you know, to the worse 'n fatherless 'ussy as 'as been so ungrateful I can't think!" She cocked her ear to listen for sounds in the back room. "Leave 'er to me, Mrs. Emory. *I* can manage 'er. 'Ome she goes this very day and 'our if she don't come over to

your door and beg on 'er bended knees you'll pardon 'er shockin' manners."

Mrs. Emory enjoyed this abasement of Mrs. Salisbury and graciously let the matter pass. But when Mrs. Salisbury gave Hazel orders to go over and do penance by apologizing, she was not tractable. Coming upon the elation of "Agatha's Victory," the heavy hand of Theresa Salisbury evoked a paroxysm of indignation. Hazel turned like a tigress upon Mrs. Salisbury and screamed at her:

"I won't! I won't! I'll run away! I hate you, you beastly, disagreeable thing!" And she rushed out of the shop and ran home, where her mother re-received the story in silence. It was unsportsmanlike of Hazel to forestall Mrs. Salisbury and embarrass her mother.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Heath, appearing at the sitting-room door. "What makes my little girl so angry?" He smoothed his great silky beard. Hazel had the passing lunatic notion that he was something like God, he never seemed to have his mind on what he was saying. For some reason or other, probably a defect in the educational system, absence of mind was an attribute of deity, according to Hazel.

"I'll run away!" she repeated sullenly.

"Wherever to?" asked Mrs. Heath gravely.

"Don't know. Don't care," said Hazel. "She's a—a—a——" There was an ominous choke and snuffle.

"Hazel!" said Mrs. Heath.

"Hazel!" warned Mr. Heath.

"Oh, I can't bear her!" said Hazel at length. I *will* run away, so there."

She cooled down a little and it was conceded she had better stay for the night. When Mrs. Salisbury arrived, after shutting the shop, and gave her version of the affair, Hazel was condemned. But she was upstairs sitting on the bed telling Lena, and Lena's silence was healing.

"Where to?" said Lena, however, when the running away was mentioned. It never occurred to Hazel there was anything more in this than an unconscious echo of their mother's prudent protest. Lena was drawing the comb through her hair with a slow and tired movement of her arm. She seemed to be always tired at night, so worn out she could not think, only yawn and nod drowsily.

"Eh?" she asked, as Hazel said something about London. "It's a big place."

Hazel muttered that she was tired of a small place.

Lena made no reply. When they were in bed, and Hazel had wriggled until Lena's firm round arm enencircled her, and she felt the soft sweet swell of her sister's bosom beneath her cheek, Lena said, as though to herself:

"Running away takes a bit of doing."

"Um," said Hazel, half asleep.

"But that's what it'll come to," whispered Lena to the ceiling.

But Hazel did not hear this. She was wholly asleep, the tears drying in irregular tide marks on her wan little cheeks. And soon the tick-tock of the alarm clock on the mantel became the staccato accompaniment of their gentle breathing.

But Hazel had not the character or fortitude to run away. She was accustomed to meditate in later years upon her own lack of these things. It seemed to her, looking back, that she was a mere receptacle into which had been poured the gift of romantic story-telling. She seemed to herself to have no courage or decision. This was partly true because, since she was an artist, she was acted upon by others, whereas a human being like Francis Striker, for example, took no tinge at all from the people round him, but remained neutral and non-absorbent until such time came when he assumed a position where by a nod or a stroke of the pen he influenced the lives of thousands who never saw his face or even heard his name.

So Hazel crept back to the shop next day without a word, thoughtfully clearing up the débris of the battle, afraid to meet Mrs. Salisbury's cold blue eye. She hated herself for this. Her ideal woman, as her readers learned to satiety, was the dashing capable being who, in the intervals of running an establishment with the efficiency of a factory superintendent, acquired phenomenal culture and lavished a world of unrequited affection upon an unworthy weakling of a husband. This was not Hazel. When her face

was smacked she flinched and she found herself whispering very rapidly:

"Cowardy, cowardy custard,
Stole her mother's mustard!"

and she pinched herself three times in the arm as a sign of complete self-abnegation. Hazel's second thoughts were fiery. Her earlier days, when she spontaneously kicked and scratched the boys who pulled her short sparse hank of hair, seemed incredible now. But she would flare up in a passion, not of anger or belligerence, but of injustice very clearly seen. She felt she was *right* and Mrs. Emory was wrong. So, when she came back again next day, she was sullen and frightened, but very obstinate.

"You know well enough where girls like you find themselves by-and-by?" whispered Mrs. Salisbury.

"No, I don't," mumbled Hazel, "unless it's in the churchyard."

"Sauce!" said the old lady in amazement. "Aren't you afraid you'll be struck for sayin' such things? No, you'll be an outcast, that's what you'll be. I see you readin' "Flotsam," and you'll be flotsam, you and your nose in the air lookin' down on decent people!"

There was not much of the beautiful and dissipated prodigal daughter about Hazel just then, but the tirade made her cry, nevertheless. She stood perfectly still on the ladder, her face to the yellow boxes

and showing saffron colour from the light reflected in them, while the tears poured down her face and dropped audibly and fatly on the linoleum.

They dropped on "Agatha's Victory," too, that night, sopping the blue cover of the exercise book. Hazel was very much alone in such a sorrow. Lena was too strong and steady to afford the right strain of sympathy, and the housework made her hard and matter-of-fact. It would have been difficult, moreover, for Lena to comprehend the cause of Hazel's troubles, she being so capable and self-possessed. Lena could never bring herself to read her sister's books. She retreated from them with a species of nausea. There was in her character a vein of intractable peasant hardness that turned the edge of all sentiment, and it was impossible to elicit from her any comment upon anything she ever read. She might like it, but she wasn't going to be drawn into saying so. So her sister, fighting it out alone in the attic of Mrs. Salisbury's came upon strange luminous areas in her own troubled heart that revealed to her the secrets of others and gave her the power to interpret the joy and grief of common life to humble and unlearned people who knew and cared nothing for art or literature.

"Copy it all out without any mistakes," said Mrs. Giffel crisply, "one side of the paper only, and for the Lord's sake don't roll it into a tube."

"Why not?" asked Hazel innocently.

"Oh, because when the thing keeps springing shut

all the time, the poor soul who has to read it will want to burn it instead of accepting it."

"Oh, I see!" said Hazel. "I'll do it to-night, Mrs. Giffel."

"Foolscap's the best," said that lady, adding in a sort of growl: "And a good name, too!"

Hazel laughed merrily and ran off to begin at once the business of buying a quire of foolscap. She almost put her tongue out at Mrs. Emory, who was standing at the door of her husband's shop, framed with ghastly appropriateness, so Hazel thought, between two slaughtered sheep, whose necks craned out on either hand and whose eyes watched the feet of passers-by like dreadful gargoyles raining blood on the yellow sawdust. Hazel saw them as unfortunate beings who had had the misfortunte to cheek Mrs. Emory and so got into her power. To her vivid fancy, however, the sheep seemed more alive than Mrs. Emory herself, standing solidly on her enormous legs, her expression was so lacking in intelligence.

The sending of "Agatha's Victory" to London marked a point in the life of Hazel Heath and her friends. It was a point unnoticed by many people in South Barnet because they not only were not aware of the event, but failed to hear anything of the story afterward. Hazel did not wake up to find herself famous, either then or in after years. Indeed, she once got off a good thing at a woman's club dinner when she alluded to those who have that experience "sleeping very late after a hard night." And even

when she was receiving those thrilling and ungrammatical letters the lady editors of enormous American women's magazines send out, people in South Barnet went about their affairs without excitement. But the copying out and mailing of that manuscript was important because it was the first living and authentic gesture of the community. It was the first movement of community life beyond the local frontiers, if we except the deplorable case of a platelayer who damaged his wife so severely that he was carried out of Smashem Street by a strong force and afterward tried for manslaughter at the Old Bailey.

It also marked a period when there came over the neighbourhood a consciousness of the larger world beyond the hills that lay between it and London. The word Empire came into use, and vague notions stirred slightly in the minds of men and women who were troubled by a peculiar state of affairs called "economic pressure." Whole families suddenly came to a decision and "went out to the Colonies," where they were supposed by the rest of the people in South Barnet to make their fortunes. Young men went away and were heard of vaguely, through their relatives, as being at Aldershot or Portsmouth. These, however, were not making their fortunes. Mr. Sewell departed upon a long and important business trip to South America and he came back full of enthusiasm for new countries. Mrs. Sewell, however, told Mrs. Giffel the food in South America was poor, if Mr. Sewell's digestion was any guide. Ade-

laide Kitching fell in love and married a pattern-maker with a good job in an engineering works in the City, who immediately took her away to India, where she wrote home letters that dealt exclusively with the gossip of the shipyard and might have been mailed from Woolwich for all they told the people at home about their Eastern Empire. And Miss Bellows selected for her paper at the Literary and Debating Society a book recently published called "The Light that Failed," and so got a reputation for being rather advanced.

All these things indicated a spiritual growth in the place. Unknown to themselves the people who became the victims of this centrifugal force eased the pressure for those who remained. This was spectacularly shown in Hazel's case when a letter in a long blue envelope came from the publishers who had kept "Agatha's Victory" for nearly three months. They were slow enough, Mrs. Giffel conceded, but it seemed they were honest. They told Mr. H. M. Heath, as they thought the author was named, that in their opinion the story had not the slightest chance of being favourably received by more than a small circle of readers. Under these circumstances, they were not prepared to offer to buy the copyright, but what they would do was this: If Mr. H. M. Heath would accept a royalty of ten per cent. on all copies sold and would forego any cash payment for a period of six months, they would bring out a small edition.

The extraordinary thing to Hazel about this

communication was its preoccupation with money. It evidently did not occur to those honest creatures in London that the author's mind was not worrying about being paid. The mere idea that anything of hers could ever be printed made her faint and giddy. Mrs. Giffel took a bold attitude.

"Let 'em go on thinking you're a man. It's my experience it pays," she said gruffly. "*I* think you'd better take what they offer. You may go farther and fare worse."

Hazel went round in a dream. Take it? She would have taken anything they offered if they only let her have the incredible felicity of picking up a book and seeing her name in print. She knew no more what ten per cent. signified than a savage who can only count up to five. It was a mood precious to young genius, but very poorly adapted to working efficiently under Mrs. Salisbury's eye. Mrs. Salisbury hated "fly-catching," as she called Hazel's trick of walking about with seraphic expression on her face, a smile on her parted lips

"I'll thank you to wake up," she remarked on this occasion. "If you're in a trance, say so."

Hazel laughed. She imagined it would be described by a novelist as "silvery laughter." Mrs. Salisbury stopped, glancing over her shoulder.

"You sauce me?" she whispered wheezily.

"Ha-ha-ha!" rippled the laugh from Hazel's lips.

Mrs. Salisbury made a sudden dive and caught Hazel in her accustomed grip of the arm. Her

fingers sank into the soft flesh and she gritted her teeth in a species of sensuous satisfaction. She liked smacking Hazel.

"Now, Miss!" she breathed. Hazel pulled with her whole body and soul and sprang away. She stood over near the door of the dark little shop, rubbing her arm and ready to take flight if necessary. When she spoke there was a new note in her voice.

"You mustn't do that," she remarked quietly.

"Oh, dear me, how polite we are!" screamed Mrs. Salisbury.

"Because if you do, I'll tell you what *I'll* do."

Mrs. Salisbury was slightly frightened. She looked foolishly at the girl before her who was still rubbing her slender arm.

"I'll put you in a book," said Hazel, and again she indulged in what she always called in her stories "silvery laughter."

And some years later she did; but Mrs. Salisbury had her revenge, for nobody in the neighbourhood recognized the portrait.

PART II

CHAPTER I

ON ONE of those fine days that come to London in September, and which resemble the foreigner's conception of English spring which he has drawn from English poetry, Victoria Street was very much the same as usual. It was some three years since Francis Striker and Louis Chaillu had first ascended to the offices of Perkins, Perkins and Partners, and the changes in that office were minute. Number Seventeen B, Victoria Street, S. W., did not change. The boy of eighteen who had perched on the stool in the outer office was now replaced by another boy of eighteen very much like him. Mason had gone into insurance and occasionally appeared resplendent in fancy waistcoats, and was heard of at Wormwood Scrubbs, where he often scored centuries for the I. Zingari or Middlesex Second Eleven.

On this particular fine day Mr. Farquharson arrived as usual at the hour of ten and found his staff at their posts. The new office boy was smoothing his hair while he examined a pimple that had appeared on his chin, while Francis, very much oversize even in that large room, held a gigantic blueprint wide in order to study the central details.

Louis Chaillu, a spick-and-span person whose hair had darkened without losing its beauty or lustre, was standing with his hands in his pockets talking to an invisible Swayne, who was secreted behind his screen.

Entering his own room Mr. Farquharson eyed the mail on his desk. All his life he had never accepted the system by which a subordinate opens and discriminates among the letters. The silver cutter lay beside the neat pile of some eighteen or twenty envelopes. Relieved of his umbrella, silk hat, and gloves, he coughed and seated himself in his chair. As he cut each one and laid it aside he breathed a little heavily with the effort of the climb from the street. His gray hair and trim moustache, the long parchment-coloured face and pale eyes behind the rimless glass, were imposing and somewhat devoid of emotion. One had difficulty in imagining old Mr. Farquharson in love or even in hate. He had just enough of the monastic tone to make weakness and grief incredible. The crimson stone in his ring set off the long-fingered hands with their flat oval nails. He resembled a benevolent bureaucrat as he sat passing the cutter through the flaps of the envelopes. But while he was doing this a large thin blue envelope brought a change of expression. He opened it and drew out the contents. Another letter from dear old Orlando. Early by a month, he reflected, and short. He spread out the single sheet and read. And the paper cutter, which had been tapping gently on the blotter, became still.

For the letter was not from Orlando. Orlando was dead. He had died while on an expedition to explore and survey a rumoured platinum mine in the mountains near the headwaters of the Corcubion River, and they had brought his body back to the great house on the slopes of Albatorre. The remarkable feature of the case, as it appeared to his old friend Farquharson, was the impression the letter gave of shock. The writer, it so happened, was the "perfect fool" of whom Mrs. Bustillo had told Louis, but it is to be presumed he had been cured of his folly, or knew how to conceal it, since he had become Señor Orlando Perkins's confidential secretary, and now wrote to Farquharson, in respectful consternation at the sudden loss of a man sixty years old, as though he had been cut off in his prime. Farquharson smiled at this, and understood the emotion. Orlando Perkins gave one the impression of undying youth. Even as a young man he wore a long beard and was a miracle of idealistic and voluble energy. Costaragua, as he had often said, had rejuvenated him, had inspired him with astonishing visions of future prosperity. And now, suddenly and while engaged upon one of his numerous fantastic quests, "our most illustrious foreign-born citizen is no more," as Señor Robles felicitously phrased it.

Mr. Farquharson sat for a long while in complete immobility, his mind preoccupied with the integrity and fire that were the origin of his friend's honourable

expatriation. But chiefly he reflected upon the concession. That unhappy business was still suspended, even as Orlando had once said he would suspend the railway itself, from balloons. It was suspended from balloons filled with enthusiasm and imagination. More than once, in the Parliament House at San Benito, Representative Perkins had held the mixed assembly spellbound as he described the incredible development of Costaragua when the capital should be linked with the coast by the railway. They listened, those phlegmatic agriculturists and conservative merchants and satisfied proprietors of estates as large as English counties, and remained unconvinced. They granted the renewal of the concession and refrained from comment upon the unwholesome result of Señor Perkins's immigration scheme, whereby several thousand Chinamen had gained entrance into the country as labourers, only to refrain from labouring save as merchandisers, undercutting everybody with their uncanny thrift and almost immorally low standard of living. The Chinamen, who either acquired citizenship and then visited their own country to marry and return with a family, or married half-breed Costaraguan girls, prospered, while the railway remained unconstructed. The Government and legislature could not regard the prosperity of the Chinamen as part of the national wealth, as they regarded the wealth of Señor Perkins, for example. And so it had come about that the railway concession was accepted by Costaragua

as a necessary evil. That it should ever be accomplished none of them, outside of Orlando's private circle, even pretended to believe. They had before their eyes the savage evidence of the mountain barrier, the frightful precipices, the foundering banks of the Corcubion, the rush of melting snows adown cataracts bearing immense masses of eroding rock and timber that jammed the gorges and turned valleys into lakes until some bank unexpectedly collapsed and the enormous reservoir would pour downward again upon the dwellers in the lowlands. And when they made their infrequent journeys to the coast they saw from the canoes the sombre remnants of the work already attempted, the rails and ties hanging like ladders from the ruined embankments, the desolate shanties around which the triumphant tropical vegetation was flowing like the waves of a verdurous ocean. They liked Señor Orlando, but they regarded his faith with pity and amusement.

Mr. Farquharson knew something of this as he sat reading the secretary's letter, and it was borne in upon him that some decision would have to be made when a disposal of the Perkins property was effected. And he was aware also of another fact—that this distant and obscure problem had been affecting himself of late, inducing strange and unwonted dreams. It had led him to the conviction that he was capitulating to the indolence of age without good reason. He was younger than Orlando if anything, and yet he had grown so used to his

soft suburban life he was afraid to run for a train. And there was another thing in his mind. While his professional caution as a consultant had led him to write with pessimism to Orlando and suggest the abandonment of the enterprise, he retained his private and personal conviction that if the problems of labour and material could be surmounted, there was a way to conquer the physical difficulties. The advance of mechanical science was not fully comprehended by Orlando on his secluded estate in Central America. They made excavators now that could keep pace with any slide, and pumps able to empty a river. He drew out his map of Costaragua again and studied it. A rise of seven thousand feet in a hundred miles was easy enough. The trouble was that five thousand of it was crowded into the last twenty-five miles. On the other hand, the hot lands, through which the Corcubion roared and rattled to the sea, seemed to contain nothing on which a road could be constructed. He frowned at the map, enjoying the problem in all its stark and insoluble perplexity. There was a way, he felt sure. Perkins's men were probably sitting comfortably in San Benito or Ortygia doing nothing. Why should they do anything, with a regular salary coming in?

Mr. Farquharson reviewed his resources. He saw himself a rather absent-minded victim of a moderate prosperity. His prestige, and Swayne's excellent attention to details, had brought him more work than the office could handle, and in the English

fashion, instead of branching out and organizing a huge business, he had merely sublet his surplus commissions to other men, less well established, for a ten per cent. fee. Like most modest and well-arranged businesses, it seemed to run itself. But Farquharson discovered this morning with disturbing emphasis that he was not entirely content with this smug suburban destiny. The death of Orlando Perkins focussed Farquharson's mind upon the more spectacular and valuable career the man had achieved in a romantic and distant region. And it hardened his interest in this forlorn concession, the cause in which Orlando Perkins seemed to have failed, through no fault of his own, to carry the people with him. For Mr. Farquharson knew as well as Perkins what that railway would do to a country like Costaragua. The effect would be enormous. Thousands of square miles now fecundating under dense tropical jungle would become available for feeding the hungry millions of the industrial north. Millions of dollars of capital would flow up that narrow ribbon of track to irrigate and develop the marvellous mineral resources of the interior. Perkins had written to him of swamps where the petroleum was oozing from the soil, of coal deposits untouched since the dawn of time, of gold and emeralds and sapphires, of forests of ebony and rosewood. And none of this was available without the railway—and a port. A port with ships to carry the rich freights to Europe and North America. Farquhar-

son in London saw the urgent need of the port even before the railway. That would be his plan. A port for deep-water ships behind Palm Cay.

And with his hand shading his eyes Mr. Farquharson sat for a long while elaborating his plan and considering this long-latent desire to struggle once more with the forces of nature. It occurred to him rather painfully that for many years he had evaded life rather than grappled with it. Ease, ease, had become his preoccupation; and all the time he had no esteem for ease in his heart. There was the matter of his obstinate clinging to old habits, for instance, his old-maidish way of living, his objection to noisy children in neighbouring houses, his austere celibacy. What was it? He had regarded it as a kind of tribute to the one woman in the world for whom he had cared. But—and here it was that Mr. Farquharson revealed the rupture modern life had made in his armour—he was not altogether sure about it now. How could he tell but that perhaps there had been another woman who might have become his partner and comrade? Men, he knew, were not as unique as all that: perhaps women could be duplicated.

That, however, was mere conjecture. Such events were stillborn in the past and could no longer be reckoned. Desire was now sublimated, as it were, and in association with his friendship for Orlando, illumined the impersonal ambition which had taken possession of him. Yet he refused to admit the

romantic view of the matter even to himself. He sought for and found an adequate excuse in the death of his friend. It would be necessary, he decided, to pay a visit to San Benito, in the interests of the firm's affairs. This evasive method of carrying out his desires was essentially English. He regarded a naked romantic motive with a certain dour prudery. Mr. Farquharson deceived even himself when he explained to the listening Swayne his proposed journey to Costaragua.

"As you know, Swayne, there's nobody here but yourself, and if anything happened to me, you would have the refusal of the practice. You managed all right when I was in Egypt. Only thing is, I sha'n't be at the other end of a cable at San Benito, Swayne."

"I'll manage all right, if I may say so," said Swayne, whom Mr. Farquharson had ordered, a good many years ago, to omit the "Sir."

"And how about Striker and Chaillu? Their term will be up very shortly. Have you any idea whether, in the event of my being detained in Costaragua longer than I anticipate, they could act as your assistants?"

"Striker," said Swayne succinctly, looking down at his cashmere trousers, his hands in his pockets.

"Why only Striker?"

"Well, Mr. Farquharson, you may not have noticed it, since you have very little to do with them, but Striker always leads."

"Well, he's the senior."

"Not only that, but Chaillu—well, if you give Chaillu a job, he will do it. Tell him what to do and he will do what you tell him."

"Excellent," said Mr. Farquharson.

"Is it?" muttered Swayne, staring at the seated Farquharson and wondering what would have been his own fate if he had done no more. "Is it? The trouble is if you *don't* tell him, he *don't* do it!"

"What does he do, in that case?"

"Goes to a matinée," growled Swayne, who had been sadly outdistanced by Louis with the girls.

"Humph! Well, he has independent means. He may possibly have no idea of practising. Heaven only knows why all the well-to-do classes seem to shunt their sons into engineering. Used to be the Church that got the family fools."

"Neither Striker nor Chaillu are fools," remarked Swayne. "They're very thick, those two."

"I don't follow you, Swayne."

"Well, Striker is one of those fellows who forges ahead, you know, takes charge and so on, and in a partnership you can't have two like that."

"That's true," said Mr. Farquharson, scraping his chin with his thumbnail. He remembered himself in the rôle of a young man who "took charge." "Well, you might sound them out, will you? Use discretion, of course."

"Naturally." Swayne opened the door of which he had been holding the knob and found him-

self confronted by Señor Bustillo, holding a letter.

"Oh, come in, Bustillo," said Mr. Farquharson. "I see you've heard the news."

Swayne went out and closed the door.

"There is not only the unhappy fact that Señor Perkins has no son to succeed him," said Mr. Bustillo, sitting lightly on an edge of the engineer's desk, "there is the danger that the reactionary party will bring in some exclusion act against all non-Latin foreigners. The local press is playing up the Chinese spider business very strongly."

"What does Umberto intend to do?" asked Farquharson.

"Who knows? He is entirely aware of the necessity of the railway, particularly if the Americans take over the Panama Canal from the French, but he is first of all a politician. Costaragua for the Costaraguans! You know all the absurd nostrums and claptrap he has preserved from his Bolívar campaigns! He is perfectly conscious of their worthlessness and will make jokes about them in private. But he is astute enough to realize the chance this unexpected misfortunte has thrown in his way."

"Ah," said Farquharson gravely, reminding himself that all these Latins talked too much, "but what will he *do?* If we put it up to him squarely—that if he does not permit the importation of labour the country will go to pot—will he see it?"

"He will want to know the colour of the labour."

"Suppose we promise him—no yellow or brown?"

"But you will never get white men to live in the *tierras calientes*," said Bustillo.

"No, but niggers might!" said Mr. Farquharson. "And you know, there is no prejudice against them in Costaragua since Toussaint l'Ouverture sent a regiment to help you against the Changuinola insurrectos."

"True, true," agreed Señor Bustillo, looking at Farquharson who was staring at the map on his desk. "And who will have the concession?" he added.

"I am going out myself to see to that," said Mr. Farquharson. "I think a little fresh blood would do the concession no harm."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that the resident staff have been hoodwinking Orlando Perkins and working with our good patriot and political strategist, Don Umberto Bustillo," said Farquharson. "And if I have to take over the concession I can assure you my employees will have to work for me and not for Umberto. *I* am not a great social and agricultural personage! But if the railway is to be built, I will build it."

The thought passed through Señor Bustillo's mind that the Anglo-Saxons were much more dramatic and talkative than the Latins, but he made no remark. Mr. Farquharson continued. His long cadaverous face was immobile above the lips, but the mouth and chin worked vigorously to enunciate the words, and his large hands were pressed together as

though squeezing something. Much more dramatic. Bustillo recalled speeches he had heard Orlando Perkins make in the Parliament House, fiery invocations, and answered by some dour phlegmatic Latin who, Bustillo knew, grew cooler in manner as his rage increased. This problem of race bothered Bustillo at times, since he was half English himself, and had his mother before him to witness the origin of his own quickness and verve.

"The whole thing has to be reorganized," said Mr. Farquharson. "As far as I have been able to make out, they are still basing their figures and estimates on the original scheme."

"You will not follow that, then," said Bustillo deferentially, "the Corcubion Valley scheme?"

"Oh," said Farquharson, waking up suddenly and drying up at the same time, "I haven't decided yet. No, not yet. More than that I can't say."

"I see. Of course, our office is not much affected by the news. But you know the rumour that has been current for months at San Benito? That the Government propose to take the concession themselves and build a state line."

"Oh, that's quite preposterous!" exclaimed Farquharson. "What! After the millions of dollars they threw away on that aqueduct business on the Pacific side? Why, the public would run them out of the Parque Colon like a flock of sheep."

"Uncle Umberto is supposed to be supporting it under the name of a State Conservation Board, for

the purpose of holding national resources in trust for the people."

"Well!" Mr. Farquharson picked up a pencil and threw it down again. "To do that they'll have to have money, and that means bonds, and bonds mean selling them in London. And what are Costaragua sevens now, eh? Can't you tell Uncle Umberto they are exactly—" Mr. Farquharson seized his *Daily Telegraph*—"exactly thirty-six at present quotations? How much will he have to pay for a new lot? Who's going to chuck money at Uncle Umberto when Home Rails and even Consols offer better security and bigger returns?"

"I only referred to it as a rumour," said Bustillo.

"More of a lying jade than usual, I should say," retorted Mr. Farquharson. "Thanks for telling me all the same. But if you ask me, and I've been asked often enough, as you know, by your people, the trouble is, too many Umbertos. He thinks ten-pound notes grow on trees in Kensington Gardens. I should like to send General Booth to Costaragua to preach to Uncle Umberto. It would do them both good."

Again the notion passed across Mr. Bustillo's mind that the English were an emotional race. He had seen some of the Salvation Army meetings and had remarked that nothing in Latin America could surpass them in hysterical abandon. And looking at this gray elderly man who sat gnawing his moustache in thought, Mr. Bustillo was troubled. He was

an intelligent creature, and the secret of these people among whom he lived seemed much more inaccessible than that of the Jews and Greeks whom he met in Hampstead, those sleek and polished beings who seemed to fit themselves into the mosaic of English life with consummate ease. And he could not refrain from wondering how far the results would reach if Mr. Farquharson went to Costaragua.

As he would, he said, at the end of the month. His mind was almost entirely made up. The next mail from Costaragua would no doubt bring details of Orlando Perkins's dispositions, and unless there was a political upheaval, Mr. Farquharson would sail for Panama where he could get a coasting vessel to take him to Puerto Balboa.

As Mr. Bustillo went out his eye fell upon the huge physical presence of Francis Striker, but he saw no significance in the fact that Francis was too absorbed in the work before him even to look up. And so, nodding to the office boy on his high stool, who was only too glad to nod in return, Mr. Bustillo went down to the offices of the Costaragua Commissioner of Works.

It was characteristic of Mr. Farquharson that he should say nothing of his plans to the young men who for three years had been so intimately associated with his business. He regarded them as boys, and while his reason probably informed him that intelligent young men do eventually develop into useful and trustworthy assistants, he had always been too

much of an individualist to take a warm and personal interest in the mental and spiritual growth of men so much younger than himself. No doubt, he may have put it to himself, they were getting on all right, had their own life, and when their terms with Perkins, Perkins and Partners were completed, would set up in practice for themselves. They had means.

All of which was true, especially of Francis Striker. That young man had preserved, in the midst of a fair amount of temptation, the ideals of his days in Rouen. A certain fastidiousness of character had rendered him immune from the sort of women who destroy men, and those of his own class were bewildered and affronted by the massive impenetrability of his mind. Old Mrs. Bustillo had said it must be like trying to flirt with St. Paul's Cathedral, and Mrs. Giffel, gallantly making an estimate from very scanty data, alluded to him as a son of Anak. These judgments, however, were superficial. Francis was not attracted by social pleasures, and his timidity toward women successfully concealed the fact that he was entirely preoccupied with an ambition of which he himself did not quite comprehend the dimensions. He was heard to say, with naïve quaintness, that his profession was a jealous mistress, though his knowledge of mistresses and their habits of mind was purely theoretical. More than once stray bohemian girls who drifted in and out of the set at Hampstead had tried to discover his blind

spot. More than once the women of his sporting friends had annexed him boldly and had got nowhere. There was no miraculous purity in Francis, but there was, entirely unknown to the world, a passionate parsimony. Even Louis, who cut deeply enough into his own income and tiny salary to pay for his pleasures, never comprehended that Francis spent practically nothing. A guinea here and there for his club fees, a few more guineas for clothes, and that was the extent of his expenses. Girls cost money, and even if they didn't Francis was shy and ill at ease with them. So this reluctance to spend was a screen behind which he could work, secure from outside distractions, at the profession which he had chosen as the gateway to romance. And there was nothing shameful in his shrewd guess that the road to his destiny would be swifter and easier if he husbanded not only the resources of his body and emotions, but those of his fortune also. Perhaps it might all be comprehended under the word "parsimony," or "thrift." Certainly the latter came to be a favourite with him, and meaning not only the art of going without, but the whole business of using one's means to the best advantage. But Louis was developing on different lines.

His hair was darker now, a soft lustrous brown and his long pale handsome face was clean shaven. His eyes, with their long dark lashes, were sharp enough, but his mouth was sensuous. Eudoxia, who had developed a strong mind and had long since

fallen out of love with Louis, told old Mrs. Bustillo that Louis had a bad mouth.

"How do you mean, bad?" asked the old lady, who liked Louis very much. "I suppose you have been reading some more of that Lavater book."

"He has an unsympathetic upper lip and a loose lower lip," announced Eudoxia, closing her own finely cut lips as though the last word had been said. Little she knew the older woman, who smiled.

"Ah, I daresay," she drawled, "the lips are open to criticism, if you take them separately, but taken together I've no doubt they meet with considerable approval and sympathy, my dear."

Eudoxia's laugh broke out in spite of her.

"Grandma, you're wicked! I believe you're in love with him yourself."

"I am," replied old Mrs. Bustillo, her eyes gleaming. "And I have the courage to say so, which is more than I can say for you."

"Me! I'm not in love with *any*body," said Eudoxia coolly.

"No," agreed Mrs. Bustillo. "I don't suppose you are. It seems to be going out of fashion among girls. Freedom and bloomers."

"Oh, bloomers!" Eudoxia shuddered.

"Well, perhaps not *yet!*" said the old lady with a flash of prophecy, and left the barb in the wound, to rankle. Eudoxia was feminine enough, as her grandmother knew, but she was passing through the independence fever, and a vague desire to live in

Chelsea induced her to talk as though her reluctant parents were fiends in human form. She got over it.

Louis, however, was not entirely transparent, and he possessed considerably more character than either Eudoxia or Mrs. Bustillo perceived. He was, for example, much cleverer in his profession than Francis, and Francis knew it. He had an aptitude for mathematics, and arrived at results therein with a rapidity that to Francis had the effortless ease of intuition. In physics he remembered without toil, whereas Francis sat up very late memorizing, without any faith in his success. It was only when they came to the estimating that Francis showed a lead—he had inherited a mysterious comprehension of money in both theory and practice. Louis understood its disbursement well enough, as head waiters and hotel keepers at Brighton could attest, but he shrugged his shoulders over estimates.

It was he who devoured the latest monographs and treatises on civil engineering, attending the meetings of the Institution, and conversing learnedly upon the fallacies and peculiarities of the great. He revealed, as time went on, a pronounced leaning toward docks and breakwaters, especially after he had been resident engineer of a new dock down on the desolate Essex coast. It engaged the poetical side of his character and he produced a small quantity of very bad verse, which was the last flare-up, before extinction, of that juvenile proclivity. Life was be-

coming too interesting to Louis Chaillu to leave much time for poetry. He had grown accustomed to the knowledge that girls liked him instinctively, and he was in the middle of a broad and smoothly flowing stream of emotion. One after another, dark and fair and neutral, they came into his life. Some he met at Hampstead, some in cosy tea rooms in the West End, some in the streets, and some even on the train as he went to and from the office. They were inevitably the light and frothy encounters of young people without cares or responsibility and involved neither obligations nor regrets when the episode ended. Louis soon learned to discriminate among the classes of girls whom he met. Those like Eudoxia, for instance, were good for a theatre or a Sunday on the River. Others, acquired at random, had to be tested with certain jocular slang phrases to ascertain their social and emotional standing. The shining adventure of this period, however, came upon him with a sudden rush that took him off his feet. Even when he had left England for ever and had surrendered himself to the woman who became his wife, he held this fugitive affair in memory like a dazzling jewel. It was unique in its completeness and mystery, for no one save the two of them ever knew of it. It had the finish and beauty of a work of the highest art and left him bewildered and somewhat nonplussed with the extraordinary possibilities of life.

Everybody in those days knew the Slazenger girls.

They had come out of a Brussels convent and gone on the stage together, creating a mild sensation by their extraordinary beauty and talent. Elsie Slazenger, the younger of the two, was almost immediately married to a younger son and eventually became a peeress. But to Marie Slazenger the world of the theatre was more congenial than any aristocratic mansion and broad acres. She married an actor and was divorced. She married a racing man and divorced him. And then, after an interval during which she toured America and made a great deal of money, she married a stockbroker who agreed, after an exciting two years, to give her an income if she would leave him in peace. The extraordinary feature of Marie Slazenger's career was that at thirty she had enshrined herself securely in the hearts of a wide public. Her glorious corn-coloured hair, her amazingly white skin and bright brown eyes, her dazzling smile that revealed her beautiful teeth, were almost a national asset. Her photographs, at half-a-crown each, were sold by thousands to Gaiety enthusiasts, and Louis himself had sent one to her with a polite little note for an autograph. It was on his dressing table at home, among several others. But she was to him a star in the heavens and he had never even waited at the stage door to see her.

And he was thinking of anybody save Marie Slazenger that Saturday afternoon near Westminster Bridge when he found himself caught in a jam of traffic and forced close up to the wheels of a carriage

containing Marie Slazenger and her poodle with a pile of hand baggage. At first he stared without comprehension and it was only when she turned her head and they gazed full into each other's eyes that he recognized her. She smiled. Women generally smiled when they looked at Louis. And then, as he often did, he blushed. Marie Slazenger smiled again and her eyes danced with amusement as she noted the look of awe and adoration upon the face of "the pretty boy," as she called him. He grew bolder as he saw at once the familiar expression come into her face, and a wild notion took possession of him. Marie Slazenger! Was it even remotely possible? He smiled impudently and lifted his hat, the crowd of people and vehicles close about him, his chin touching the folded hood of the landau.

"How do you do?" he whispered, and bit his lower lip.

The star, whose deliciously piquant features were veiled and crowned with a velvet toque, stared at the young man in frank and delighted wonder. Her own special line was "nerve." She carried her audience with her breathlessly by her daring and diablerie.

"I like your cheek!" she murmured, and he took her up.

"I'm so glad. I like yours. It is lovely," he responded, maintaining a tone blended of impudence and respect.

"Oh!" she cooed. "Where have we met?"

Louis raised his hat again and sighed.

"I think I was a King in Babylon when you were a Christian slave," he chanted easily, loud enough for her to hear. She laughed.

"I remember. But I've forgotten your name."

"Louis," he told her. "King Louis, you know."

"Which Louis?" she asked, glancing at the traffic ahead, which was beginning to move.

"Oh, any one. Louis the Well-Beloved, if you like."

"I remember you," she trilled, her white-gloved hand on the carriage handle. "Can I give you a lift?"

And Louis, remarking that she had already lifted him to the seventh heaven, got in quickly, while the poodle barked until smacked, and the carriage drove rapidly toward Victoria Station.

By the time they reached the station Louis had caught the adventurous and roving fancy of one of the most charming personalities of the day. She was thirty-one and Louis was twenty. The combination of his youth, wit, and handsome bearing, with the faint Gallic flavour of his speech, the delicate deliberation and diffidence he affected at the beginning of a sentence, troubled her experienced heart.

"I should like to see more of you," he remarked, when she had her ticket for Brighton, and a maid, who had come in a cab, approached to say a carriage was reserved.

"Well!"—she looked him over with a swift ner-

vously appraising glance—"I shall be back for rehearsals on Tuesday."

"Oh, before then! How can I wait all that time?" he urged eagerly, touching her arm as they walked toward the train.

Again she laughed, this time more uncertainly. She was shaken. She loved this sort of thing. Speed and courage she loved beyond all other qualities.

"You can dine with me to-morrow, if you like," she remarked at length.

"Where? At what hour?"

She named the hotel and mentioned eight o'clock.

"If I like!" he said hoarsely. "I say, you—you aren't jockeying me? No, I beg pardon. I was mad to say such a thing. I'll be there, at all costs, at eight. I must be dreaming this!" he exclaimed.

"No!" she protested. He paused at the ticket gate, but the collector waved him on to the platform. He walked as though actually a somnambulist. His vanity, which was very strong, was almost deranged by the extraordinary fortune that had befallen him. To win the favour of Marie Slazenger, the most deliriously alluring of all the artistes on the comedy stage, to be invited to dine with her! A thought struck him.

"Alone? Shall we have dinner alone?" he pleaded.

"Would you rather have company?" she began, but he checked her.

"Oh, anything but that! I should hate it, Miss Slazenger, if anything came between us!"

It was a clumsy and unnecessary speech, yet she loved him all the more for the ineptitude of it. She smiled ravishingly as she entered the reserved first-class compartment, her glorious brown eyes melting with intoxicating loveliness as she returned his ardent gaze. She was an experienced woman in affairs of this sort and it pleased her to unmask all her batteries upon this green, attractive boy. But she did not know his capacity. As the guard approached, locking the doors one by one, and Marie Slazenger's maid hurried away to a third-class carriage, Louis put his hand in the pocket where he kept his keys and assured himself his own railway key was there. She leaned out, her arms on the lowered window, and they lost themselves in one another's eyes, smiling unutterable thoughts. There was a whistle from the engine, and porters waved, calling out, "Stand away there!"

"I cannot wait till to-morrow," he muttered.

"Oh, but you must!" she replied, laughing. "It's too late now. I'm locked in."

"Are you glad it's too late?" he asked, as the train moved.

"No, very sorry!" she assured him gaily.

In an instant he had drawn the bunch of keys from his pocket, opened the door and jumped in. The train moved out over the river. Louis sat down to recover his breath. For a moment his presence of mind failed as he looked at the girl who sat with her lovely face averted toward the window. She had re-

garded him with stupefaction as he leapt in, almost fear. Would she pull the cord and stop the train? Would the wondering porter do that? For a while nothing happened to break the tension between these two. He drew out his cigarette case.

"May I smoke?" he murmured. She shrugged. He put the case away again and stood up. The train was moving faster now among the South London roofs. As he raised his arm to the communication cord she looked at him.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded.

"Stop the train and get out," he replied quietly. "I have been an awful rotter. I could kick myself."

"Oh, don't be so silly!" she exclaimed, cutting in on his self-reproaches. "Let me think. You have got me into a pretty kettle of fish."

"How is that?" he demanded, bewildered.

"Do you know if this train stops at Three Bridges?" she asked, pressing her finger into her cheek.

"Yes, I heard them call out Three Bridges," he answered. "Do you mean I can get out there and go back?"

"Go into another compartment," she corrected.

"But—why?" he persisted.

She made a slight sound of tongue against teeth signifying impatience, and then suddenly turned to him with mock, wide-eyed seriousness.

"Because of a—oh, a very trivial thing to you, no doubt, but my husband will be there to meet me."

"Your——" Louis looked at the sweet mischievous face so close to his own, and his first sensation of panic and fear turned to one of elation and pride. He had misconstrued her aloofness. It almost made him dizzy to think that he had dared to do what he had and that she was not furious with him. And her husband. He did not know who was the present incumbent. He merely became aware of a novel feeling of smug complaisance at being preferred to her husband by a married actress.

It may be doubted if Louis ever learned the irrelevant fact that Marie Slazenger's husband was not in the habit of meeting his wife on her arrival at Brighton. The middle-aged man in checks and spats who was on hand on this occasion was someone else, a person who was vastly useful to the actress in many ways and whom she was indisposed to affront. Louis, after buying a Gladstone bag and a few things to put in it, took a room in the hotel, and his earlier daring was very much toned down that evening as he sat in the great ostentatious dining room and watched, from afar off, the goddess of his dreans eating a very hearty dinner in the company of the red-faced, unsmiling middle-aged man who had met her at the station. Louis was more miserable than he had ever been in his life. He thought seriously of throwing up the whole adventure and returning to the humdrum safety of the Lodge and Perkins, Perkins and Partners. Women were fickle and faithless hussies. Actresses should be avoided. What a fool

he had been to imagine a woman like Marie Slazenger would waste a moment save to make him ridiculous! His logic came to his rescue here, telling him he had made himself ridiculous by jumping into the train. He went for a walk by himself on the Esplanade after dinner, returning to his room early and disconsolate. He found a note there from her telling him he was a dear delightful boy and she would see him at noon the next day when they would have a lovely time. It sent him to his bed in a dream of ecstasy.

The significance of all this lay in the utter obliviousness of Louis to the forces of Destiny. He was a young man in good circumstances and those circumstances permitted him to stroll happily along through life, and he was apparently getting a great deal of pleasure without paying anything for it. It had never occurred to him that pleasure is paid for at all. Nor did he comprehend that the only currency Fate accepts in payment for it is pain and misery. To him women were a charming amusement, and he had only the most rudimentary notion of how a woman felt when she was with him. Marie Slazenger knew this perfectly well, and while her temperament and circumstances led her to extract the fine essence from many passing encounters, she had penetrated to the core of the young man's character at once. She knew he was not in love with her, and that he was merely sailing along on the surface of life. She thought about him a good deal that evening at dinner and a whim seized her to turn the next day into a romantic

episode. No one knew how to do this better than she. She was an artist in emotions. She lived by them, as all artists do, and she could shape and polish an episode until the man who shared it would treasure it in his heart for ever. For her perception was sharpened by her experience, which had taught her how each moment of happiness was purchased by periods of pain, and she sought to evade this law of compensation by evoking a spirit of romantic illusion, so that the adventure assumed the guise of an act of devotion.

And so Louis, who had spent the morning indulging in fantastic imaginings that were half poetical and half sensual, was scarcely able to recognize the trim figure in Donegal tweeds who came down to him as he waited in the foyer of the hotel.

"I used to go to school near here," she told him. "I want to visit the scenes of my youth."

She took charge of the expedition and soon they were at the station and he was ordered to buy two tickets for Shoreham.

"What are we going to do?" he asked when the little local train began jingling westward. She looked at him with a smile and patted his cheek, and he put his arm around her delicious waist.

"Little boy," she whispered, her eyes shining through the veil that covered her face. "Little boy, I've put you on a pedestal. Please don't fall off!"

He looked at her with bewildered admiration. She made him feel very proud and valiant.

"A pedestal?" he repeated, not entirely comprehending.

"Yes, just like a statue. I want you please not to do anything that would make me think any less of you. Will you make that bargain with me to-day? So many men don't understand what a pedestal is, and they think a woman who is on the stage is fair game. Oh, it is terrible, the way men reveal themselves to an actress! They never seem to realize she is a woman with feelings of her own and ideals too. So I want *you* to be different. Let's be two children to-day, playing on the beach and having high tea at a place I know at Lancing. Such a duck of an old woman keeps it, and we can have sausage and mash for supper!"

And that was the way they spent the day. Without knowing it, Louis told her everything about himself, his work, and his friends. He told her of Francis and how the two of them were pledged to stick to each other in life. Of the Bustillos and Eudoxia and the old lady.

"I think it's splendid!" Marie Slazenger cried. "Will you really stick to him if he needs your help? And is Eudoxia nice? I can see her! Dark, isn't she, and with freckles near her eyes? Yes, I see her. She'd make you a good wife."

This was a false move of Miss Slazenger's. The idea of marriage had never even occurred to Louis. He was one of those men who have to be bludgeoned into matrimony as it were. He was on the surface of life. He shook his head.

"I'm sure she would not. I am not a marrying man," said Louis sententiously.

"But if you were——?" said Miss Slazenger archly.

"Ah!" said Louis, and laughed as he tried, almost for the first time, to see himself as a husband. He had never envied any husband except Shelley the poet.

"Well?" asked Miss Slazenger.

It was in this fashion that she heard of a girl away in northern London who, it seemed, was "awfully clever." She had written a story, but it didn't sell much, Louis understood. No, she wasn't *very* good looking——

"Which means she's a fright?" suggested Miss Slazenger.

"No! But she is like a—a spirit," he explained lamely "I mean you do not think of her body, but of her mind."

"You are in love with her," said Miss Slazenger.

"I have not seen her for weeks. I have not spoken to her for *years*," protested Louis.

"All the same, you are in love with her."

Louis was not experienced enough to understand why his companion, as they walked along the sea front at Shoreham, should insist upon this when she had so little data. Having placed Louis upon a pedestal, Marie Slazenger wished him to remain there in a condition of hopeless adoration for herself, but she could not resist the desire to probe among his

adolescent emotions. He hit, quite by accident, upon the answer she wanted.

"Ah, if I had only the right to love you!" he whispered, and she had to remind him of the pedestal.

They had high tea, as she had proposed, in a cottage at Lancing, and they were very merry over it. As they sat smoking cigarettes afterward and he looked out of the window at the hollyhocks, it occurred to him that it was a very different adventure he had planned and that he had never been so happy. He recalled other times when he had come to Brighton and looked down at the table gravely, wondering how he could have been so base as to imagine this beautiful creature could ever have had anything of the sort in mind. A great wave of gratitude and worship surged up in his heart for her. And by a curious repercussion of emotion he found himself thinking of Hazel Heath, that tall thin girl with the magnetic eyes behind the glasses, whom he sometimes saw hurrying along at South Barnet. Love! He was bewildered somewhat, not being quite so sure as usual of the frontiers of passion. What was this that he felt for the woman who was playing him so skilfully now, drawing strength and inspiration for herself from his youth and naïve charm? Why should the memory of Hazel come up at this juncture when he scarcely gave her a thought from day to day? How long ago it seemed since they met in the wood and he was spouting poetry! He stared out gravely into the autumn dusk, adrift on an ocean of thought,

an ocean smooth and without a sign of bad weather in the sky. Something of this came to the woman who sat looking at him, smiling at her own romantic fancies.

"You have known nothing of life yet, Louis," she said gently.

"I——!" he stammered, thinking of the episodes of which he was no longer proud.

"Nothing!" she insisted, laying one hand on his. "You think you are in love with every girl who smiles at you, and you know nothing about it."

"So!" he muttered, a little crestfallen.

"You must forget all this," she said hurriedly. "You must devote yourself to your profession, like your friend. If not you will fail in life. A woman never respects a man who neglects his work for her," she went on.

"But when one is young is the time to enjoy," he said.

"You will be young a good while yet," she retorted. "I know men of fifty who have made their fortunes and now enjoy life as much as you."

"Why do you tell me this?" he asked.

"Because I like you," she said.

"Like, like!" he repeated with a laugh. "That is not love."

"Oh, don't be so silly!" she exclaimed. "Who are you to ask for love?" And the rush of her anger silenced him.

"Some day," she went on gently, "you must come

down again and we will come here and talk things over. You will be engaged then and you will tell me all about her."

"No!" he cried. "You said just now I must work, nothing but work."

"Well," she agreed, "if you do that I shall be proud of you. Perhaps I shall say to myself, 'I inspired him to do all those wonderful things.'" And she laughed again, stroking his hair.

The most wonderful thing of all to Louis was the ride up to London on Sunday evening. They were alone, and as the sun set over the Downs she put her head on his shoulder and slept. Yet his feelings were very different from those he had harboured on the way down. He realized that what old Mrs. Bustillo had said was true—women who were worth anything were difficult to secure. Another thought came to him as he watched the even rise and fall of this woman's breast—that women were individual personalities, and not mere pawns in a young man's game with life. This fact is not reached or comprehended so easily as some imagine, and many pay a higher price for the knowledge than Louis, who had always been lucky. Some men even marry before they know this, and stare at their wives in amazement when they make the discovery. Louis trembled now and then as his imagination hovered about the future. He would soon be a free and independent person with a future to make or mar. What would happen to him? His spirits fell as he thought: probably

nothing. He would float along on the river of life, comfortable and prosperous. The world would always be at peace; there would always be something interesting happening in town; he would jog along and some day be like old Farquharson, in muffler and spats, an irritable boss with young fellows in the office. . . .

"I don't suppose I shall ever do anything worth while," he thought. "There's no romance any more." He spoke of this when the train stopped at Clapham Junction and Marie Slazenger woke up.

"Oh, yes, there is!" she told him. "Look at General Gordon."

As she spoke they looked at each other and were aware of a slight chill in the air.

"He was killed," he muttered without laying any special emphasis on the words. Marie Slazenger shivered.

"I don't know why I mentioned him," she said in a low tone. "Please forget what I said."

It is possible he did forget it, for he was young, but she did not. She remembered, years later, and shivered again.

It made her gentle with him as they parted that night, and she consented to let him see her some time while in town.

"Don't forget to bring the pedestal, little boy," she said, as her carriage moved away, and he exclaimed:

"Oh, I say, rather!"

It was late when he reached home. There was a light in Francis Striker's room as Louis passed, and he knocked and entered. He was eager to tell his friend of the wonderful time he had been having. Francis was holding up a pair of riding breeches before folding them away in a huge kit bag he was packing. He only grunted as Louis proceeded with his tale.

"What's the matter? You don't seem interested," he said at length. "Is anything wrong?"

"I am going to Costaragua," said Francis, without stopping his work. "Are you coming?"

"Costaragua? Why, has old Farquharson decided not to go?"

"In a way, yes," said Francis unemotionally, "he has. As a matter of fact, Louis, Mr. Farquharson fell down as he started for the station yesterday morning and when they picked him up he was dead."

"And you go instead, for him?"

"No. I'm going for myself. And you are coming with me."

Louis thought of Marie Slazenger with delight.

"Yes, of course I'm coming," he said. "How much will it cost?"

"Every shilling you have," retorted Francis Striker. "We are going to buy the concession."

And for some obscure reason, as he lay down a few minutes later, the thoughts of Louis turned to Hazel Heath.

CHAPTER II

ONE of the drawbacks to South Barnet, in those days, owing to the way it had grown up, as it were, between two more elderly communities, was that when Mr. King became a missionary, there was no resident minister for the chapel. The itinerant system of the Methodist Connexion, by which a pastor can never be more than three years in one house and is continually occupying fresh and surprising pulpits, worked against what most people would call efficiency. But in addition to this, South Barnet Chapel had no minister of its own. It was a sort of wayside shrine, if one can call a galvanized-iron shed a shrine, where travelling priests held services as they journeyed to and fro. It so followed that, much to the dissatisfaction of Miss Culvert and Mrs. Mills, they had an unusual number of students sent to them to try their prentice hands upon a comparatively unimportant congregation. Now nobody wants a student. He is young and generally serious. He has enormous masses of undigested erudition and theology in his head, and he is generally unable to keep these out of his sermons. He is a sort of cadet in the army of the Church Militant—not yet an officer with a commission, but with all the conceit

and bumptiousness of a major-general. It is no satisfaction for a man or a woman who was a professing Christian before the student was born, a man or woman with children as old as the student, perhaps, to sit and listen to his academical bleatings. What such people need is not theology but sympathy shot with spiritual experience. They are hungry sheep, to use Milton's phrase, and when they look up they expect to be fed with something else than the platitudinous husks of seminarial textbooks and crude elocution.

There was a certain compensation for this arid provender in the inevitable supply of local preachers. They were so far from being academical that they left their grammar behind when they ascended the pulpit. It was as though they entered for a race and, in the words of St. Paul, laid aside every weight, even their sense of humour, and their aspirates. As Mrs. Giffel remarked of one worthy ministrant, when he referred repeatedly to the 'eavenly 'osts, "his speech bewrayeth him." But these illiterate souls had been through the fire. They knew the bitterness of semi-poverty and the struggles of prolific matrimony. They knew something of the needs of the congregation, even though Miss Culvert did overawe them with her prestige as a spiritual expert; and they gave that touch of bizarre colour and violence generally absent from stereotyped evangelicalism.

But the time was coming when these pioneers were to be supplanted by a new order. The galvanized-

iron shed was to give place to a building of stone and red brick, with a spire and a real organ. For a good while money had been accumulating from the proceeds of sales of work, of teas, and of bazaars, and a loan arranged from the Circuit building fund. A strong effort was to be made to raise a good round sum through a series of special services by famous preachers. Everyone was pressed into the campaign. Miss Culvert and Mrs. Mills visited nearly every house in the neighbourhood collecting subscriptions. Mrs. Giffel wrote a breezy article for the paper, and Hazel Heath, who had a great local reputation as a literary character, was indulgently invited to contribute something that could be used as a souvenir. But for some reason or other, Hazel, who had cut off her hair just round her ears, said she'd see, and eventually saw very little, for the chapel got nothing out of her. Lena was asked, of course, to cook, that having been accepted as her only accomplishment. It never occurred to anybody that this girl, who spent all her time working at the back of her parents' house, disliked cooking. So she was asked and she gave her usual short answer and made a phenomenal number of cakes for the great tea meeting that was to come off on the Wednesday night. It was quite an accident that one of the children should call and try to sell Lena a ticket for the tea. Lena did not brood upon this. She merely shook her head and shut the door. She had become somewhat more taciturn with the years. She was nineteen and she was un-

able to see any future for herself in South Barnet. On one occasion she had broached to her parents, the question of going into service and they had shaken their heads, because service was a step down. Not that Lena desired to go into service very much. She knew she would work just as hard for about fourteen pounds a year and she would not have her own way, which was very dear to her. But she was conscious of a strong urge to see something else beyond the chicken house at the end of the garden. She seemed to make no friends among the young men. She was not a showy girl in her dress, for she had no money to buy clothes, and she affected neutral shades so as to pass unnoticed. And when she did attract the notice of a young man who took her for a few walks, she was so devoid of interesting conversation that he gave it up and Lena sank back into obscurity again. When the young men of the neighbourhood discussed her over the billiard tables behind the Black Swan, opinions were vague and diversified, but most of them betrayed respect.

"Keeps herself to herself, anyhow," said Tom Peffer, now a strapping improver in the plastering trade and making good money.

"All the same, I'll bet she'd be hot stuff if you could get her started," retorted George Salisbury, who had had a checkered career trying to get Lena's sister Hazel started. George was inclined to brag about his remarkable success with girls, but his mates knew him.

"Go on! Who's to start her? You?" asked someone. And George, who was nearer the truth than they imagined, subsided.

But it was no one in South Barnet who was destined to get Lena started. Indeed, it was not a matter of sex at all with her. She was reaching a point when she had to be "out on her own," as she put it to herself, and one day, when she had been visiting her sister Fanny over at Clapham, she did not wait for the omnibus to get to South Kensington Station, but got off when it had crossed the River. Almost without intending it, she found herself in Chelsea. And in her purse she had a crumpled piece of paper, on which were written the name and address of Mr. George Bayliss, the artist who had painted her one Sunday years ago as she stood at the gate.

Standing on the sidewalk of Oakley Crescent where the bus had left her, she asked a policeman for Glebe Place. He extended an arm along Cheyne Walk, looking the quiet girl over with an experienced eye.

"Who'd you say? George Bayliss? 'E's all right, 'e is."

She looked at the policeman in surprise, and he winked.

"Lookin' for work?" he asked, with an affable air.

"That's my business," she remarked placidly.

"Well, no offence. I'm tellin' you, ain't I? And all I mean is, if you was lookin' for a clean room, me an' my missis 'ud be glad to 'ave you."

"Thanks," she said. "I'm only looking round just now."

The policeman's eye followed her along Cheyne Walk. "Humph!" he muttered. "That's a fine one. Got a way with 'er too." And he crossed over to have a look at the River.

Lena came to Cheyne Row and turned into it as she had been directed, and it was not long before she discovered herself in Glebe Place. It was perfectly quiet and somewhat different from her preconceived notions of what artists' studios were like. The policeman's wink rather puzzled her because she was quite sure in her own mind it could be no reflection upon the moral character of the artist. Perhaps it meant he was a jolly sort of chap and sometimes had to be helped home. She found Number One and began to walk beside the railings looking carefully at the names on the brass plates. Halfway along she came to George Bayliss's name in red on a copper panel, and she rang the bell with a very pronounced feeling of the importance of this visit. Somewhere in the vicinity a barrel organ was playing,

"Oh, what a surprise!
Two lovely black eyes!"

and still farther off she heard the sound of the muffin bell on Oakley Street, and saw in her mind's eye the smart figure walking very erect, balancing the tray of muffins, covered with a white napkin and green baize cloth, on his head, his white apron neatly

tucked into his waist band at one corner, and his bright brass bell swinging rhythmically as he called: "Muffen! Muffen!" with an indescribable London twang. This was London, an enormous presence into which one became absorbed. She seemed to feel the pulse of the place, a friendly throb, as was the voice of the policeman and the comfortable gesture of the bus conductor helping her off the step. The door opened and she turned to find a young man, in a remarkable red waistcoat with brass buttons and smoking an extremely elaborate pipe, looking at her and waiting to learn her business.

"Mr. Bayliss?" she said, and the young man opened the door a little wider.

"He won't be long," he said. "Won't you come in?" And he looked into her eyes with a pleasant smile. She stepped in and looked round.

It was a very large studio of the more expensive kind and the whole northern side was glass with blue and yellow roller blinds half drawn. It was so large that the canvases piled in one corner seemed small, the model's throne was like a small island on an ocean of floor, and far away, where an oriental rug was spread in front of a small iron stove, was a girl on a couch, bending over a low tea-table. At the back were doors behind *portières*, and on the walls were a number of Chinese prints and a mandarin jacket in peacock-blue silk as though hung there to dry.

Lena, coming slowly across the diagonal of the great floor, wondered if her nervousness was visible

to the girl who raised her eyes and looked over her shoulder at the new arrival.

"Will you have some tea?" asked the young man. "This is Miss Adela Braybrooke, the most beautiful model in Chelsea!" And he laughed at his own wit.

"Cheese it, Leslie!" said Miss Braybrooke in a low tone. "I didn't catch your name, dear," she added to Lena.

"My name's Lena Heath," said Lena. "No sugar, if you please."

"You haven't been long in London, I suppose," said Miss Braybrooke, glancing at Lena's clothes. She was a rather dissipated looking girl of about twenty-five, with a supple and sinuous figure quite unsuited to the truculent and tired-looking face beneath a mop of yellow hair that ended in an untidy swirl on top of her head.

"I live out Barnet way," said Lena, drawing off her gloves. "I only called on my way home from my sister's at Clapham."

For a moment a queer light shone in Miss Braybrooke's eyes, but it died away again as she looked at the quiet girl sitting beside her.

"I see," she said, and then to the young man, "Leslie, get some more water. This tea's stewed."

Obediently the young man named Leslie Courtney went through one of the doors at the back carrying the copper kettle.

"You aren't a model then," said Miss Braybrooke.

Lena shook her head.

"Looking for a job?"

"Well, I had some idea of it."

"And you with a good home, I'll be bound!"

Lena was silent. She was unable and unwilling to express what she felt on this subject. She had given way suddenly to an impulse in getting off the bus at Oakley Street, and it had left her in a very cautious and frightened mood. Miss Braybrooke took a cigarette from a box on a shelf behind her and lit it with exaggerated care.

"Don't!" she said distinctly. "It's a rotten business."

"What?" asked Lena, without looking up.

"Being a model."

"Oh!" said Lena, and then the young man came back jauntily with the kettle, which he set on the stove.

"Now empty the teapot. I told you it was stewed," said Miss Braybrooke, and he obediently trotted out again.

"Are you a friend of Mr. Bayliss?" asked Miss Braybrooke.

"No. I called on business," said Lena curtly.

"Well, I suppose I'm nosy. Everybody says so," said Miss Braybrooke looking round drearily.

Lena was distressed. She did not wish to snub Miss Braybrooke, but she was too inexperienced to trust herself to a lengthy explanation. She only remarked that if Mr. Bayliss would be long she would not wait, but would call another day.

"He's generally in now. You see he lives along the Walk, and if his wife has company for tea, he goes in."

It became evident that Miss Braybrooke was anxious to pour out a great deal of information and only required a listener. Lena learned that the young man now making a noise in the little scullery, who was named Leslie Courtney, also lived on the Walk "with his parents," and had a very nice disposition and was always to be trusted to take a girl anywhere without ever trying anything on. He was an artist, too, but only in an amateur way, as he was a clerk in some government office. "He says they're like the fountains in Trafalgar Square—they play from ten to four," observed Miss Braybrooke.

And then, while Lena was digesting this information, a key was inserted in the front door and Mr. George Bayliss, A.R.A., came in.

He did not show any recognition when she looked at him, and Lena's spirits, never very high, went even lower.

"Heath?" he said slowly, shaking hands and looking hard at her. "I'm afraid you have the—— Oh, Lena! Now I remember. It's the hat defeated me," he added in explanation. "Take it off."

"No, I thank you," said Lena, and into her voice came the dour resistance of many generations of cantankerous yeoman ancestors. "I only came to—to see you, as you asked me," she muttered.

"And I'm awfully glad you did. Hullo, Leslie!

You know Miss Braybrooke? Now we'll have some real tea. And have you come down here to live?"

Lena explained how she had happened along at this time, and they sat down. Leslie Courtney, next to Lena, began to make himself agreeable, offering her cake and macaroons and asking her if she took one lump or two. And Lena was glad to talk to him, reminding him she took no lumps at all. He had a quick courtesy that pleased her; he was a gentleman, it was easy to see, and the character Miss Braybrooke had given him made Lena regard him very favourably.

Mr. George Bayliss, lying back in a deep chair with huge wings that almost hid him save the hand that held the teacup, studied Lena at his ease. He remembered her now. A nice girl. She would certainly make a good model for a picture he was thinking out. He winced as he thought of it, for it was an advertisement for a mineral water. It was to be a picture of the spring of eternal youth, with a maiden filling an amphora. Bayliss was one of the first of the leading men in his line to see the money to be made in commercial art. But he was not prepared to take the risk of proposing a professional career for Lena. If she was in the neighbourhood, that was another matter. He marvelled that she should have remembered for so long. Evidently he had made an impression on her. His glance went to Adela Braybrooke and hardened. Adela lived in Church Street and there was nothing the matter with her save that

she was a bad model. She had not the least intelligence when it came to understanding what her employer wanted. She would listen in an attitude of apparently sympathetic comprehension and permit him to arrange her limbs as he desired, and then, when he turned to look at her from his easel, she was in a quite different pose. Yet she was docile in the sense of not taking offence, and she made a studio comfortable. But she was always borrowing money, and that demoralizes both artist and model. Bayliss chewed his moustache. He had three children, and his wife was an attractive woman whose social connections were of great help to him, and for him the model question was entirely professional.

Lena found herself listening more and more attentively to Leslie Courtney's words, though what he said was nothing extraordinary. He chatted of theatres and music halls, of the lovely view on the River, of Battersea Park and the penny steamboats that took you down to Greenwich and back in an evening. Indeed, she forgot Mr. Bayliss, who was conversing in a low tone with Miss Braybrooke, and even forgot to drink the tea she held in her hand, enjoying the novel sensation of having a well-bred man pay attention to her. Leslie Courtney even asked her if she did not care for tea, and she gulped some hastily.

"Oh, yes, indeed. I—I was listening to you," she said, and she bent her head to hide the flush she knew would cover her face. When she looked up

again, Miss Braybrooke was staring straight into her eyes with a peculiar absent-minded expression. Lena rose and Leslie Courtney sprang to his feet.

"I must go. I've a long way to go. I shall be late," she remarked, looking round in a rather dazed way and picking up her gloves. Mr. Bayliss rose and held out his hand.

"If you should decide to come down, let me know, will you?" he said hospitably.

"Thanks, I will. I may," she replied; and Miss Braybrooke shook hands limply without rising.

"I can put you up, dear," she murmured.

Leslie Courtney made a dive for his hat and stood waiting.

"I'll see you to the station, if I may."

"Oh, don't trouble, thanks, I——" Lena did not manage to finish the sentence, but hurried away as though escaping from an intolerable situation. But outside she discovered the young man at her side.

"I'll show you a short cut," he remarked cheerfully and leading the way through upper Cheyne Row they came out into Oakley Street. Strange to say, the short cut was of very little use to them, because Lena discovered presently that they were crossing the road by the Bridge and looking down the broad reach of the River toward Hammersmith. She looked at her companion gravely.

"I wanted to show you, you know," he explained, "what I was speaking about just now. The colour of the water, you see? People think water is water,

but it isn't always the same by any means. Look! Violet now over there—then what I call zinc-colour, and down by the Bridge burnt umber. Isn't it glorious?"

Lena said it was, and they stood there by the flaring curve of the bridge parapet watching the swiftly changing hues of cloud and water between the dark shores, and close by the sombre black bar of a bridge lower down. The River seemed to be flowing in a broad stream of molten glory from the wide-open furnace of the sun, and the distant bridge, with its curved arches, was like a sluice through which the radiance was pouring toward them. The globes on the Embankment sprang away from them in an exquisitely curved chain beneath the trees, and on yonder shore the silent warehouses and factories were like the broken battlements of a dark forsaken city against the pale southern sky. To the two young people standing side by side while the great buses rumbled past them and the bridges trembled beneath the rolling wheels, there was a sacramental quality in the beauty of the sunset, and they were thus able to communicate things to each other which they were too young and too shy to utter in words.

He was still making little quick gestures in the air to explain the way he would paint that sky when she said hurriedly:

"I shall be awfully late getting home."

"I'm sorry!" he exclaimed, taking her arm. "Let me get a hansom."

"Oh, *no!*" she protested. "My goodness, I couldn't!"

"I insist," he said, and he held up his hand. "It's only a few minutes in a hansom," he assured her. A cabby climbed into his seat and whipped up his horse. Lena was very nervous.

"You shouldn't!" she muttered, but she got in.

"You know," said Mr. Courtney, "I should very much like to see you again, Miss Heath."

Lena wanted to see him again, but she had been brought up to conceal her desires and so she remained silent as the cab proceeded quickly up Oakley Street and across the King's Road.

"But I suppose that's hardly likely, is it?" went on her companion.

He was something new to her, yet familiar. She liked his neat athletic figure, his small feet, and supple shapely hands. She liked the air of high breeding that somehow emanated from him, the dark aquiline features and sleek hair. She had nothing but instinct to guide her, and his eager homage made a powerful appeal to her. She had given the matter no prolonged thought; but since George Bayliss had formed the basis in her mind of an ideal man, and this new friend had all the qualities she had liked in the older artist, it was natural she should regard him without disfavour. But the unaccustomed pressure of emotions disturbed her mental balance and made her reserved and cautious.

The hansom was now passing up Sydney Street—

in fact, they were passing the very house where Francis Striker once had so alarming an adventure. They were too engrossed in their own thoughts to notice, but a woman, elegantly dressed and drawing on very long white kid gloves, was standing in the doorway of the house while a servant with a white cap and apron blew a whistle for a hansom.

Suddenly Lena said, half to herself:

"I've never been away from home."

"Oh, I say!" murmured the young man, abashed.

"We're poor," she blurted out, and then sat back staring in front of her.

He said something about that being no disgrace.

"I don't know about its being no disgrace; it's very disagreeable," retorted Lena grimly. "I'm sick of it."

They crossed the Fulham Road and darted along Onslow Square to South Kensington Station.

"Have you a ticket?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, thank you. And thank you for coming with me."

"I must see you again," he remarked in a low tone.

"I can't promise," she answered, trembling a little.

"I'd like to give you my card," he went on. "And if you come down"—he watched her tuck the card in her purse—"let me know, won't you?"

"I can't, I can't promise!" she repeated pitifully. "Please let me go; there's a train!" And Lena almost ran down the stairs.

She had reached King's Cross before she regained her composure. Lena hated emotion, in a way, not so much because she was cold, but because emotion seemed to demand expression, and she did not know how to do it without losing control of herself. She looked at the card and read the name over. Haythorne Terrace seemed a great distance off. She sat in the New Barnet train, her eyes closed, dreaming of extraordinary adventures. Goodness! Was it possible men would like to be with her and talk to her and pay attention to her? Lena had not believed in the sincerity of the young men who had "hung round," and, indeed, they had been scared of her preternaturally pompous father and did not do themselves justice. No one, especially when young and endeavouring to show to advantage before a girl, likes to have encyclopædic information poured into him. Moreover, those young men at South Barnet were not like Leslie Courtney. She caught her lower lip between her teeth and stared out over Finsbury Park, telling herself not to be a silly. How could any one like him think twice about her? She trembled again. Lena was one of those girls who mature very early in body and mind, yet remain emotionally inexperienced until they meet someone who assumes full possession of their hearts. But the resistance at his first appearance is very strong, and sometimes these girls make serious mistakes in their choice. Very few people are aware that this is due to nervousness or inexperience, because such a thing seems

incredible in women so formidably equipped for the battle of practical life.

It was when Lena got home to Haythorne Terrace that evening that she heard of the triumph of Mrs. Mills and Miss Culvert. They, with Mr. Sanders, who was reluctant and doubtful, had managed to get the Reverend Frank Austell Wynn to conduct the services on the Sunday evening which was to be the high-water mark of the great effort. Miss Culvert was sitting in the front room telling Mr. and Mrs. Heath all about it—the journey to West London, the difficulties with secretaries, and the final triumphant success in getting the eminent divine's interest. But of course it was not his divinity that over-awed Miss Culvert and Mrs. Mills, it was his secular fame. For the Reverend Wynn had become celebrated beyond the Connexion for his humorous writings, his lectures on West of England life, and his wonderful personality. He was "a draw." The chapel would be full indeed when it was known the Reverend Frank Austell Wynn would be there. He stood for celebrity in the minds of many simple folk. They were proud of one of their own faith achieving what they believed to be a fame equal to that of bishops and novelists while maintaining the standard of nonconformist spiritual integrity. But he was so humorous! Miss Culvert wiped her eyes as she told, for the tenth time, how he had assumed a stern demeanour and accused Mrs. Mills and herself of conspiring to lure him away from his own church merely

to make his congregation jealous. In some magical fashion the Reverend Frank Austell Wynn could say *such* things, and instead of frowning, sincere Christians would laugh and admire him more than ever. He was wonderful.

Lena listened quietly, rather ashamed at the very different errand she had been engaged upon herself. She was frightened at the lack of sympathy she found in herself for all these great doings at the chapel. It was not that she disagreed with Miss Culvert, but that she simply didn't feel that way. It had been a great shock to that lady when Lena had declined to take a class in Sunday school. Lena said she was very sorry, but she couldn't. She didn't understand children well enough. And nothing could budge her from that. She let Miss Culvert talk, but went back to her work in the kitchen. After all, that was something she understood, and somebody had to do it, didn't they? So she reasoned to herself; but now, confronted with the tired happiness in Miss Culvert's eyes, and remembering how happy she herself had been down in Chelsea, she was ashamed and slipped away to change her dress. She knew, without even going to look, that there was a large pile of dishes in the kitchen waiting to be washed. Some would be washed already, and would have to be done again, because Margaret, who occasionally assisted, was not very careful to get the dirt off before she dried them.

Hazel, who came home later on from a class in

bookkeeping she was taking at the town hall, found Lena sitting on her bed looking at her hands in a puzzled way.

"How's Fanny?" she asked, and Lena replied indifferently:

"Same as usual. The baby isn't very well."

Hazel was now tall for her age. As Mrs. Mills said, she was "running up," and the phrase, for some reason, infuriated Hazel. "She talks as though I was a hollyhock!" she would explode. "Is it my fault I am doing what every other human being in the world is supposed to do? I suppose she ran up herself when she was young. I'm not a scarlet runner, anyhow, like Lillian!" This was a cutting reference to Lillian's partiality for red and her habit of running, for the train.

All the same Hazel was tall. She was no longer in Mrs. Salisbury's clutches. She was at the ribbon counter in a new shop on the Parade and had acquired a great deal of hauteur, most of which arose from her feeling that she was stooping to remain in a shop at all. "Agatha's Victory" was to be found in some shops, second hand, even now, and she had another novel nearly finished. That terrible fluency of phrase and fecundity of invention did not begin until later. Something was holding Hazel back. She seemed uncertain of her future movements, speaking haughtily to her mother about "going to London," and alluding vaguely to being "tired of the suburbs." The suburbs came in for a lot of crit-

icism from Hazel at this time, and were coupled with something she called Philistinism that was supposed to be the last word in scorn. It was very difficult to live with Hazel at this time, because of "Agatha's Victory" preventing any one squashing her with an emphatic "Who d'you think you are anyway, Hazel Heath?" There was a subtle poison distilled into the minds of the other girls in the neighbourhood, girls who had won scholarships or who had married young men in good positions. They could not allude to "Agatha's Victory" as a failure because they had never even achieved a failure, and Hazel was doing another book. Hazel lived in an atmosphere of contemptuous anticipation. Her attitude seemed to express a warning to the world to look out, as she intended to astonish it. The difficulties of making a living, however, tended to make the world inattentive to its danger. Hazel at times outlined her views to Lena.

"I'm simply buried alive here, Lena," she would say. "How can I ever get to know the right sort of people in a hole like this?"

"What sort of people?" asked Lena.

"Why, the artistic and literary sets, of course," Hazel replied. "Of course, *you* don't realize it, but the people here are horribly suburban. I believe you'd stick here all your life and never notice it."

Lena did not answer. She was thinking.

"The boys are awful," went on Hazel. "The

decent ones are all too jolly well stuck up to see anybody but their own tennis crowd. Like Miss Bellows and the Strikers!"

"Well, you don't blame them, do you? Wouldn't you?"

Hazel made a sound of impatience.

"That's why I want to get away from it all," she exclaimed. "I'll never do anything here, never!"

"Well, what *are* you going to do?" Lena inquired patiently, thrusting her arm into one of Hazel's stockings and scrutinizing the toe for holes.

"I'm going to clear one of these days, you see," said Hazel darkly. "I won't be able to stand much more of it."

"Yes, but what will you *do ?*" insisted Lena. She could never understand how Hazel forgot the necessity of meaning something when you talked. "You can't live on air pie and rain water, can you?"

"I shall write," said Hazel in a superior manner.

Lena thought this about the maddest notion anybody could entertain, but she made no comment. She was thinking of Leslie Courtney and wishing something would happen that would give her an excuse for going down to Chelsea again.

"Others have done it," remarked Hazel.

"Done what?" asked Lena, who was at a loss.

"Why don't you listen to me when I'm talking?" burst out Hazel. "I say others have left home and gone to London, and won fame."

"Yes, but——" hesitated Lena.

"But what?" asked Hazel, watching her sister moodily.

Lena wanted to say the others probably had something better to depend on than a brown-paper parcel full of very poor handwriting. But Hazel's air was thunderous, so Lena merely remarked that something coming in every week was not to be sneezed at.

This only made Hazel sigh and feel that Lena never would understand what it was to have ambition and a desire to get away from the home nest. Poor Lena! Hazel, in a flash of insight, saw her slaving away all her life in that Haythorne Terrace kitchen, never becoming aware of a larger, freer air outside.

In the meanwhile the chapel folk were energetically preparing for a memorable series of events. The neighbourhood was placarded with large notices in red announcing the coming of the Reverend Frank Austell Wynn. Mrs. Giffel wrote an article for the paper giving the public some idea of the treat in store for them, tickets were sold for a giant tea meeting, articles by the score were made for the sale of work, and even the Sewells, the robust and extremely secular family next door to Mrs. Giffel, were induced to buy tickets, make some doileys, and take an interest in the chapel instead of their usual line of home concerts. It did not last long, and Mrs. Sewell carried home no great opinion of the Reverend Frank Austell Wynn. She had been brought up Church and, as she told Mrs. Giffel over the back garden wall, Church she'd die, and her idea of a clergyman was

more like the Reverend Arthur Osborne, that nice young curate. She liked a clergyman to *be* a clergyman, and anyhow she thought a much better class of people went to church.

Mrs. Giffel did not argue the point, because she liked the Sewells secretly and enjoyed their uproarious sing-songs with such remarkable songs as:

"As I was sittin' on de kitchin stairs,
Sing song sitty, wot che Kimeyo!
I seed a catapillar sayin' his prayers—
Sing song sitty, wot che Kimeyo!"

or that wonderfully pathetic lyric:

"Life's too short to quarrel!
Hearts too precious to break;
So shake hands and be friends again
For old times' sake!"

Mrs. Giffel liked this, but it was not the whole of her life. She had never admitted it, but when Hazel Heath had got "Agatha's Victory" accepted by a publisher, Mrs. Giffel herself had nursed ambitions of a literary character. She had tried at various times to do something to send up, but her heart had failed her. "When it's done, I don't know whether to laugh or be ill," she muttered to herself. So she contented herself with doing her local articles as well as she could, and she was one of the first to inject a little humour into the accounts of neighbourhood news. Once, when a tough matron down on Smashem Street hurled a bread pan at her husband, damaging

him considerably and getting herself locked up, Mrs. Giffel headed the incident, "The Flying Bread Pan." At first the editor cut the heading off, but he felt himself attracted and laughed. Why not? He let it go in. It was the thin end of the wedge.

But it was on the occasion of the Reverend Frank Austell Wynn's appearance that Mrs. Giffel reached the high mark of her career as a journalist. Of course, it was a great subject, and she handled it in a way that hinted at future possibilities.

The chapel was crowded. People thronged the aisles. The vestries were thrown open and filled during the opening hymn. The Reverend Wynn stood a while staring at the hymn book as though he were in a trance. He was tall, gray-haired, with very small white mutton-chop whiskers on his fresh cheeks, a decisive mouth and eyes he had trained to be piercing beneath shaggy brows. His clerical suit was a wonderful fit and he seemed fully aware of his celebrity. But as the hymn proceeded he looked on each side of him at the throngs in the aisles, and he beckoned to them to ascend the pulpit stairs and even into the pulpit, and offered his own hymn book to a nervous awkward man who happened to be among the late comers. It was a striking gesture—the great preacher so humble in mind he stood among them all like a common man. And when the sermon began at last, Mrs. Giffel found material for an article that caused an impression even among her uncritical neighbours. She fixed upon the fact that the

preacher was theatrical, and the only thing to decide was whether his theatricalness was justified by the thrill he gave the congregation, or the audience, whichever you cared to call them. She alluded to his attitude, his dramatic pauses and gestures, the modulations of his voice, the full mellow body of it coming forth from the pulpit with a supreme mastery of elocution. And there was the daring of his words. Was it possible he had said, "When a man is cold and hungry and wet and has nowhere to go, it is no use talking to him about his soul. *He doesn't know he's got a soul!*" There was a sensation when the Reverend Frank Austell Wynn brought that out. What would John Wesley have said to that? some of the congregation wondered. But they did not know a very great deal about John Wesley in spite of their admiration for him. And then in the course of his sermon, which was upon the divinity of Christ, the preacher made the assertion that when He made His sacrifice and left His place beside the Father to become man, at that moment He was holier than the hosts of heaven. Some of the older and more prosperous of the congregation, whose acquaintance with sacrifices was of the slightest description, seemed to be doubtful of this, but the sermon swept on with dramatic intensity to the *Via Dolorosa*, to the final scenes of the Transfiguration. The Reverend Frank Austell Wynn had not been quietly to Oberammergau without getting many pointers for the augmenting of interest in the Gospel story. Nor had he

studied practical elocution for nothing. The packed audience sat motionless and without a sound, every eye fixed upon the man in the pulpit, fearful lest a syllable be lost.

"Not a wet eye in the place," muttered Mrs. Giffel as she went home to write that article that just missed being sufficiently remarkable to catch the eye of a London editor. She had the idea. She had caught the exact tone of the meeting; she had sensed the theatrical quality, the lack of that spirituality that wins souls and comforts the broken-hearted. It was, though Mrs. Giffel didn't know it, the crucial point in her career. She never did anything approaching the quality of that sermon report and gradually she got discouraged. And when Mr. Sewell came home from a voyage to the Argentine and said he was going out there to start a branch for Spingarn's and would Mrs. Giffel go with them as housekeeper, Mrs. Giffel girt up her loins and sold her small property and said she would. She came home to Haythorne Terrace that memorable Sunday evening and she could see ahead of her Mrs. Heath with Mr. Heath, who for once had consented to go to chapel instead of church. A thought passed through Mrs. Giffel's mind that for a man who was a burden to women the way he was all his life, it didn't much matter where he went. She could make out the stout pair going along arm-in-arm, with the children just behind. She turned into her own house and saw the Sewells coming up. She was thinking of running in

to see them; they had such nice homey and unconventional suppers. Mrs. Giffel wouldn't have admitted it, but she preferred these Sewell girls, who boldly got young men to come in and be their sweethearts and enjoyed themselves without ever wondering what the neighbours thought. It was a relief from Mrs. Mills's throaty pomposity and Miss Culvert's virginal intensity. Only that morning Mrs. Mills, still in weeds after all these years, was giving away little pieces of paper with a hymn printed on them. "You know, my dear, this hymn has been such a blessing to me in my great sorrow. I've had some copies printed, in the hope it may be a blessing to others." Mrs. Giffel didn't believe in that sort of stuff.

And that was what she did do. She had just got into the Supper Ring, as the Sewells called it, all sitting round the room while the two youngest, called the Supper Slaves, handed around the eatables and opened bottles of beer and ginger beer and made a noble brew in a large fat jug, when there was a timid knock at the door, and when Mrs. Sewell opened it there was Margaret Heath, a pretty little girl with her plaited hair bound round her head in shining coils. She was very frightened, and gasped out:

"Oh, if you please, Mother says will Mrs. Giffel come round at once?"

"Why, Margaret, what's the matter?" said that lady, putting down her plate and coming out into the hall.

"I don't know. I mean—— Oh, Lena's left a note and says she's not coming back."

"Not coming back? I didn't know she'd gone. Where has she gone?"

"I don't know," said Margaret, beginning to sniff. "Mother's very upset. I think Lena's run away."

"Now did you ever hear the like o' that?" asked Mrs. Giffel, wringing her hands. "And I never saw it before. Always I thought it was Hazel. Tk—tk! There, I'll come. Let me go with you, Margaret. Lena! Lena! Oh, why didn't I *see?*"

And the two of them hurried around the corner to Haythorne Terrace.

Mr. Heath was sitting perfectly motionless, like an Assyrian sculpture, in the front room. Mrs. Heath was sitting with the tears pouring down her face. She and Mrs. Giffel were folded in each other's arms for an instant and then the awful news was revealed.

"That a child of mine!" was the refrain of Mrs. Heath's lament, and she looked at her clasped hands. Mrs. Giffel was unable to get the drift of these remarks until Miss Culvert came hurrying in. She had been to send one of the Kitching girls for a policeman.

"What do you want with a policeman?" asked Mrs. Giffel, mystified.

"Drag the river, send out a description, offer a reward," said Mr. Heath, without moving at all. He spoke as though he were in a trance, and perhaps

he was. The loss of a daughter was to him the loss of a valuable piece of property, and if they began to run away, where would he be?

"Oh, but that's nonsense!" Mrs. Giffel remarked. "Lena will write, I'm sure. Can I see the note she left?"

It was on the mantelshelf and Margaret handed it to Mrs. Giffel. She was reading the brief scrawl when an idea came to her.

"Where's Hazel?" she asked suddenly.

"She's been in, but she went for a walk," said Mrs. Heath wearily. "*She* doesn't care! I don't know what's come over Hazel lately. She acts as though she was a little bit off."

"Humph!" Mrs. Giffel scowled over Lena's note:

DEAR MOTHER:

I am going away. To earn my own living. Not to be a burden to you and Father any more. I think I can do it. I have had an offer, and I would like to be on my own. I will write a postcard when I get settled.

Your loving daughter,
LENA.

It rather took Mrs. Giffel's breath away, that calm allusion to the burden she was to her mother and father. Mrs. Giffel couldn't help comparing it with the unconscious bewilderment in the faces of the parents at the sudden withdrawal of the principal personality of the household.

"She wouldn't have left a note like that if she had not made up her mind to do something we should

never approve of," said Mrs. Heath. "I can't *think* what made her do it. A good home, and always here instead of running round. . . ."

Mrs. Giffel admitted the force of Mrs. Heath's argument about the note. Lena would have said what she was doing and gone openly, except that she was being led astray. Miss Culvert, who was struck speechless by this terrible calamity, sat moving her lips in prayer. Mrs. Giffel reflected that prayer was all very well but it didn't explain anything.

"I'm going to look for her!" Mrs. Heath said at length, rather wildly.

"How can you? You don't know where she's gone. Didn't she ever *say* anything about her friends?" asked Mrs. Giffel.

They shook their heads. Suddenly there was a commotion in the hall. Margaret was heard talking and Hazel's voice said in curt response:

"What? Oh, rubbish! Are they? Goodness!" And then she came in, tall and slender, in a plain black dress, her hair cut short, her sharp eyes shining behind the glasses. Miss Culvert did not like the look of Hazel.

"What is it, Mother?" she asked. "What's this Margaret says about Lena?"

"She's gone off to earn her living, she says," said Mrs. Heath. "I suppose she didn't do it here! Girls always want to work for strangers rather than their own flesh and blood."

"Strangers pay them wages, I suppose that's the

secret," said Mrs. Giffel glumly, thinking of Cicely, with her fourteen shillings a week in an office.

"But what could Lena do for a living?" asked Hazel in amazement.

"That's what everybody wants to know," said Mrs. Giffel.

"Oh, it's absurd!" said Hazel, thinking hurriedly how Lena had taken the wind out of her own sails. Lena run away! It was like saying the house had run away. Hazel sat and sat until she felt in a daze. She was vexed. She had come in very full of something that had happened to herself, and found all the interest she had counted upon absorbed in contemplating an insoluble enigma. Hazel's story-telling faculty was at work at once. It never occurred to her, however, that a girl who had done the work of the house almost single-handed for so long, might not be so badly off as the family she had left. Hazel did not think to go into the kitchen, where the dishes would have to be washed three times a day, twenty-one times a week, one thousand and ninety-five times a year, now Lena was gone. She thought of Lena as the extraordinary heroine of a romance—but who would want Lena, good old Lena, always so surly and so very much Johnny-on-the-spot, to run away? Here was a mystery for a story, and Hazel was astounded to find how difficult a mystery is when it actually happens. Mystery! she thought to herself, and then, in a vague uneasiness she saw Mrs. Giffel looking at her mother. Mrs. Heath's hands

were being patted by Mr. Heath, very gently and as it were with the desire to avoid notice, and her face was drawn and tired. Hazel remembered the last time her father and mother had sat in this way and she forgot both herself and Lena. She understood the peculiar expression on Mrs. Giffel's experienced features, and she caught her breath. She saw the grim thought forming in Mrs. Giffel's mind as that lady rose and looked away.

"Well, the Lord gives and the Lord taketh away," Mrs. Giffel remarked unsteadily. "If you ask me, you'll all go to bed, Mrs. Heath. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. I'm off." And away she went, feeling between the fingers of her black cloth gloves and wondering what on earth would become of the Heaths if Lena didn't appear and another addition to the family did appear.

"I suppose he'll call it Octavia!" she said to herself. "That man plays only one tune and he doesn't know what a sense of humour means."

CHAPTER III

YES!" said Miss Braybrooke, as she squatted beside the window of a studio on Cheyne Walk, "I know all about it. It's because you haven't a thing of your own. I read a lot of socialist books because my steady's a socialist, or thinks he is, and they make a lot of argument against capital because so many men don't own any property and they want to. Men, you see, not women. And we want something we can call our own just as much as men do. More."

"Yes," said Lena. "That's it. But Mother and Father think I've run away to be a bad girl."

"Of course they do. They always think a girl is bad if she wants to be on her own. They think she ought to stay in the house and work, work, work, morning, noon, and night, Sundays and Bank Holidays. I tell you I was through it all, years and years ago."

"All the same, I don't blame them for being anxious," remarked Lena. "I wrote as soon as I got here and now they're coming down."

"Well, we've got that room upstairs and as soon as my things come round from Church Street they can come down and welcome."

"They won't stay long," said Lena. "I know that."

"They don't, as a rule. It was my old lady came, when I started. Road to ruin, and all the rest of it. But I said to her: 'Mother,' I said, 'you let me alone and I'll let you alone,' I said. Oh, she cried, and then I cried, and at last I went back to Walthamstow with her. But not for long. I think Chelsea grows on you, if you ask me."

"It's being able to support myself that I'm thinking of mostly," said Lena, omitting to ask her friend.

"Now let me tell you, dearie, you've been and gone and put my nose out of joint with Leslie."

"Why?" said Lena colouring, and she stopped on her way to the gas stove.

"Never you mind why," said Miss Braybrooke, "but you have. And I may as well tell you at the same time you're a lucky one. *I* don't mind. I daresay Jimmy and I'll get spliced one of these days, if he don't pick up any more of these funny advanced ideas. Don't you mind me. I like Leslie. He's a nice boy. And you'd get on with his relations while I wouldn't. They're too highty-tighty for me, I'm afraid."

"You have no right to say such things," said Lena, pouring boiling water into the teapot.

"I know I'm nosy—everybody says so."

"Don't be silly, Adela; you know I don't mean that. But when you talk about me like that I feel unhappy."

"Whatever for?" said Miss Braybrooke, reaching

back for a cushion and arranging it behind her head. "Mashing a man doesn't make *me* unhappy."

"I know," said Lena soberly, coming forward with the teapot. "That's just it. It's fun for you but not for me."

"Then you're gone on him yourself, dearie—is that what you mean? Haven't you had any fellows before?"

"I never cared for going round with boys," said Lena incisively, "and I don't now."

"You don't knock 'em in the eye, I admit, but, oh, dearie, it only proves men are blind bats unless they're artists and authors. Trust old George to see you."

"It was an accident," said Lena, colouring again.

"Yes, I know. And he's straight, George is. Some of these chaps round in Margaretta Terrace and in the King's Road are—well, you'll find out. Stop them dead," said Miss Braybrooke dramatically. "They'll never bilk you, don't forget. Those sort are always afraid of the exposure. Americans are the best. They have plenty of tin and as a rule they're rather stand-offish. Still," added Miss Braybrooke, her profile very clear and like an intaglio against the dark cushion, "you can't always tell even about them. There was one in Beaufort Street used to talk about the sacredness of womanhood, and he wanted me to go to dinner with him at Romano's!"

"Where's that?" asked Lena.

"Well, it's not sacred to womanhood anyhow, dearie," returned Miss Braybrooke drily; "and it's

no place for the likes of us. I wouldn't be saying," she continued, and paused, as though she really had some difficulty in discovering something she would not be saying—"I wouldn't be saying as a girl mightn't take up with a feller if she was balmy about him and they couldn't possibly get spliced for some reason or another. I don't say that. But it doesn't come that way often, and even then you get the dirty end of the stick. No trial trips for me, anyhow!"

Miss Braybrooke liked Lena, and when the latter had come to her room over the tobacconist's shop in Church Street on Sunday night, she made her welcome in her own way. Lena never forgot the moment when, after climbing the two flights of stairs, the odour of the Sunday dinner still in the close dark air, she stood before the door of the back room and knocked. Her courage was about done; if Miss Braybrooke had not been in, Lena would have gone back home. But there was a sound within the room and after a pause which Lena intuitively allotted to the putting on of a wrap, the door opened and Miss Braybrooke, in a very soiled tea gown, peered out.

"My word!" she had remarked, taking a long draw at her cigarette. "And we was talking about you only the other day. Do come in, dearie."

"I've only fourteen shillings," said Lena, when she was inside and taking off her hat, "but I'll get a room in the morning."

"There's room here," said Miss Braybrooke, patting the bed on which she was lying. There was

certainly very little space anywhere else. Even Lena's room at home was larger. "And you're rich," added her companion. "My boy's got the sack, and I paid when we went to the Empire last night."

"But—why did you go if he hadn't the money?" asked Lena, looking round vaguely for a place to wash her hands.

This was Miss Braybrooke's opportunity to tell Lena about her sweetheart, who was a young man with radical opinions, a small aptitude for design, and a still smaller faculty for keeping a job.

"There he is, the blessed angel!" she said, pointing to a photograph over the bed. "We haven't much money but we do see life."

And it was because she liked Lena that she set to work in her own way to give the girl some of that wisdom so necessary to one who earns her living by being a model. Miss Braybrooke was very like a woman of the half-world in her appearance, and she was fundamentally virtuous. Indolent by nature, she was also warm-hearted toward innocence. She had the baffling quality that accompanies the possession of sophisticated goodness. Her very tolerance toward the fallen enabled her to avoid their fate more easily. And to the men who made a practice of getting girls into trouble, Adela Braybrooke made known the fact that she knew them and disapproved of them. Her chief fault was her lack of culture, for it must be confessed that a model is, to a much

greater degree than the public imagine, an actress if she is to be of much assistance to her employer. Adela Braybrooke had even features and a beautiful body, but as George Bayliss had remarked in a moment of irritation, her Creator had omitted to provide her with a brain. This was an exaggeration, of course. He ought to have said temperament. Miss Braybrooke could, and did, later on, become a talented manageress of a high-class laundry at Acton Vale. She could never pose successfully as Latona or Astarte, to whom

Sidonia's virgins paid their vows and songs.

Her talents lay in another direction, and she had not, when Lena knew her in Chelsea, discovered her métier.

The studio in which they were sitting, waiting for the cart to bring Miss Braybrooke's property from Church Street, was rented by Leslie Courtney in the interests of art. His people lived in a large house farther along Cheyne Walk, but Number Twenty-two C, where the studio was, up two flights behind a little tailor shop, was in a different world altogether from One Hundred and Seven B, where the family lived. In between lay a line of dwellings that included the whole gamut of London life, from great houses of Queen Anne and Georgian architecture to junk shops where cats'-meat was sold, and taverns whence the drivers of hansoms and four-wheelers were borne insensible on Saturday nights. There

were common grocers' shops and art tea rooms with oriental ceramics stuck over the doors. There were huge new mansions with outlandish portals of copper and bronze side by side with the modest dwellings from which nursemaids with children emerged to take the air in the narrow gardens about the statue of Carlyle. It may be doubted whether Leslie Courtney's relatives had the remotest conception of the squalor of Twenty-two C. Their encounters with art took the form of meeting an occasional Academician at dinner. Leslie, they understood, was by way of being a Revolutionary. As they were very fond of him, his peculiar ideas were condoned so long as he appeared at dinner, which was at seven sharp.

The studio reflected the talents and taste of the tenant. There was a throne, for in those days of which mention is now made artists were unable to draw without models. A large number of water colours hung on the walls, mostly landscapes with trees and eccentric cloud effects, and there were many drawings of the Thames. No doubt Whistler was the god of the young man, and more than one sketch, wherein wriggles of brown or blue paint stood for humans and a smear of yellow or green represented the sea, was visible on the not overclean walls. A rug of immense age and many rents, that caught inexperienced feet, covered the floor. Behind the door stood properties of different periods and utility—a pair of Wellington boots and a busby of gigantic size,

walking canes and fancy parasols, a wooden skeleton collapsed upon an octagonal concertina-case, and several swords—while from nails depended masks, castanets, and girdles of beads from foreign parts.

"A nice thing, wasn't it, to raise my rent just because I wanted to go in with a friend," remarked Miss Braybrooke.

"And it was too small, anyway, for two," said Lena.

"She never *dreamed* I'd leave, though," observed Miss Braybrooke grimly.

"No, you had her there. Is that the man with your things?"

Miss Braybrooke raised herself and listened.

"I believe it is. I'll go and see."

Downstairs, in the darkness of the entry, which gave upon a side passage between the houses, the two girls could see the owner of a hoarse voice demanding Miss Braybrooke.

"Bring the things right up to the second floor, please," called that young lady, her arms akimbo.

"Right you are, Miss," said the hoarse voice. "I only wanted to make sure. Number Twenty-two B sez she'd give me in charge if I brings any furniture there, she sez." And he plunged the entry into momentary darkness by going out into the passage.

"That's old Miss Trayman," whispered Miss Braybrooke. "She paints fans and lives all by herself. No models. She thinks we're all no better than we ought to be. I must say I think she's a lot

worse than she might be. She knocks on the wall when Leslie plays his concertina."

"Because she doesn't like it?" asked Lena.

"No; because she used to like him. Set her cap at him, I've heard, and he wasn't taking any."

"Oh, go on," retorted Lena. "You've got a yarn about everybody."

"Some things I could tell you would make your eyebrows curl and your ears flap, my dear. Here he comes with the family treasures. Oh, Mr. Sigg, have you got any help? That chest of drawers is heavy, you know."

Mr. Sigg, though he found the banisters rather in his way and broke a number of them, was able to advance bumpily and with many grunts. The girls retreated before him, offering advice as to the exact location of corners and window ledges until they found themselves upon a bare landing with the rays of the afternoon sun lying like bars of dusty gold across the floor of a big empty room.

"It's lovely," said Lena. Miss Braybrooke laughed, which was rare with her.

"I was going to say, not so dusty—but it is—look!"

"Oh, dust always shows in the sunlight."

"We'll have a housewarming. I must go down and get that head." This was a model in bronze of Miss Braybrooke's own head that a sculptor had given her when he went to Paris. It was her greatest achievement as a model and showed her asleep, as

indeed she was when the artist did the work. Miss Braybrooke might have seen the irony of this, but she never alluded to it.

It must not be supposed that Miss Braybrooke moved from Church Street to Cheyne Walk without letting the news get about. It might almost be said that telling her friends about her affairs was the breath of life to Adela Braybrooke. And so it was to be expected that the friends, as soon as the light was gone, should come round to see her and offer assistance. They came. Several more banister rails were heard to give way as they came up after Mr. Sigg and helped him with Adela's trunk, a very large affair indeed. Leslie Courtney was the first to arrive, he having secured the room from the landlord at the very reasonable rate of four shillings a week.

"Well," he said, "how do you like it?"

"There's no water," said Lena, in dismay.

"No, it all has to be carried up. But I tell you what we'll do. There's a little boy next door who will bring up a pail every morning for threepence a week. I know because I give him a ha'penny whenever he brings me a pail to the studio. So that's settled. Now where do you want this table?"

Lena liked Leslie more and more as the moving in continued. He jollied Mr. Sigg, who was perfectly content to be jollied so long as he didn't have to jolly back. Leslie pointed out that if they didn't have water on that floor, they had a most wonderful fireplace. "I do believe it's a genuine Adam," he

said, examining the carving. Two more people came in just then and said the view when the window was washed would be marvellous. These two were actors who lived on Sydney Street when they had the price, and as this was not often, they slept round in studios, acting as models in costume, and were gifted with an astonishing faculty for being on the spot if any refreshments were served. It was a singular feature of these two tall and distinguished-looking creatures, with their huge signet rings, dirty cuffs, and boots with exploded uppers revealing inadequate hosiery, that nothing could make any mark upon their self-esteem.

"Hullo, you people," said Gerald Lashmore. "Introduce me, will you? Heard you were moving, Adela darling. Can't we help?"

"I suppose you've heard we are going on tour," remarked his brother easily, with deep notes from the throat that made Lena look at him with attention.

"Oh, really!" said Leslie Courtney, unrolling a rug and pushing them out of the way. "Who with?"

"Oh, Tree's going round the world, you know, and he wants some good people. I said I'd go, for ten pounds a week."

"I think it's too little, Percival," said Gerald seriously, lighting a cigarette and throwing the match into the fireplace with an inconceivably delicate gesture. "All very well to see the world, but *I* shall stand out for twelve pounds a week."

"Lucky chaps you are," said Adela slowly, her hand on one hip as she tested the straightness of a

picture she had just hung. "I suppose you can find time to come round this evening about nine. We're going to celebrate."

The Brothers Lashmore announced, after serious consultation, that they would be free at nine. "We have to go round and see a friend of ours who's just back from Florence. He has a villah there, you know. Perhaps you know him—Dibdin—lives in that big house in the King's Road. Well, we'll look in at nine, girls. Charmed to meet you, Miss Heath. Bye-bye, Leslie."

They went out. Leslie Courtney straightened up from the corner of the chest of drawers, looked round cautiously, and laid his finger on the side of his nose.

"Would you believe," he whispered, "that those two would jump at twenty-five bob a week if they were offered it? Dibdin and his 'villah'! Dibdin's a big black-and-white man and he got his 'villah' by work, not loafing round. He'll probably be touched for five bob to-night. Who's this? Oh, come in, old man."

The old man referred to proved to be a young man in neat checks, with an unmistakable American felt hat and thick yellow gloves pulled down from the wrist. His extreme neatness of attire, the pink perfection of his face, and the sharply pressed lines of this suit gave him an air of something manufactured, and his voice, when he spoke, had an echo of some extraordinary and long-forgotten emotions. Lena regarded him with earnestness as he came forward, his

yellow cane hanging on his arm, his handkerchief of puce silk check drooping from his breast-pocket, his hat held horizontal in his hand; and bowing to Adela and herself with great courtesy he observed that he was mighty glad to enlarge his acquaintance in London. Leslie introduced him to Lena.

"My friend Mr. Semple from America." He bowed again profoundly, and again, as he spoke, Lena was aware of that echo. He was her first American, and this is, for a certain type of the English, like seeing themselves for the first time in a mirror, or hearing themselves speak. He did not look like an artist, and, indeed, his business was the buying of pictures more than the painting of them, though he possessed to the full that remarkable national proclivity for doing a great many things, and was happily oblivious of the normal limitations set to human genius. So he painted and wrote and carved and designed. He composed music and lectured and made poetry and preached. As George Bayliss drily remarked on one occasion, "artists think Semple's a fine author, and authors reckon him a clever artist." To all he was a smiling and courteous stranger, no one ever having fathomed his ultimate desires or ambitions. He was one of the few friends of the Courtney family who mixed in Leslie's studio life, considering him a genius not yet come to flower.

Some of this reached Lena in the course of the ensuing hour. Mr. Semple took off his coat and began to help. He went out and made extensive purchases

at the little shops along the Walk, those charming relics of Victorian days, with dark green-painted fronts and small windowpanes, and with their windows full of gaily coloured merchandise. Indeed, Lena wondered if he did not pay for more than Adela had given him the money for, when he arrived with bottles of beer and whiskey, tins of tongue and chicken-and-ham, bags of rolls and biscuits, tomatoes and lettuce and cucumbers and lemons.

"We'll begin by giving Mr. Sigg a drink," said Adela. "What'll you have, Mr. Sigg?"

Mr. Sigg, looming large and perspiring in the doorway, having brought up everything on his cart, mopped his brow and said he'd have a drop o' beer and the charge was three shillings. A cork flew out with a noise like a gunshot, a glass was filled by expertly inclining it toward the foaming orifice, and the same glass was quite as expertly emptied by Mr. Sigg into his throat. Slipping the half-crown and sixpenny bit into the flap pocket under his green baize apron, Mr. Sigg, who sold cats'-meat and old furniture and even Bohemian glass, but who did odd jobs as well, descended into the darkness.

"It doesn't look as if they would come now," said Adela to Lena in the small cupboard-like pantry on the landing.

"They couldn't get back before dark anyhow. Well, they've got my letter. I said I was all right and I gave Mr. Bayliss's address."

"I tell you what I wish you'd do," said Adela. "I

wish you'd go round and ask George to come in this evening. I know he doesn't go in much for studio things, seeing as he lives with his family in Oakley Street and dresses for dinner and all that, but see if he will."

"All right," said Lena slowly, "I'll go."

She went. But when she had descended, the clear and ambient glory of the evening drew her through the gardens to the wide flags of the Walk, where the River was at the turn of the tide. A tug racing downstream was sending out diverging waves that ran up and along the embankment below with a soft sound like a caress. The sun had set. Beyond the roofs and towers of Hammersmith lay a sky of crimson and purple, with a long level belt of dark cloud edged with bright gold. A steamboat went past, flogging the water with her paddles, a concertina sounding merrily from the crowd of trippers bound for Kew, the green light on her sponson flashing like a jewel. Lena stood a moment watching a scene that held her more and more every time she saw it. For her it was romance, that wide waterway whose first beauty she had seen with the eyes of another. She was unable to check the acceleration of heartbeats as she leaned on the balustrade and watched the whorls and streaks of colour on the surface of the stream as the tide began to slacken. The thought of the River coming down from her own country, from that sheltered and austere region where her ancestors had lived with a narrow and frugal dignity for so

many centuries, and passing on through the huge mystery of the city to the distant sea, held her imagination. It was life unrolling before her, and she found herself speculating, with virginal delicacy, upon the fortune awaiting her, now at the turn of the tide.

She roused from her reverie and hurried across the roadway upon her errand. The policeman who had directed her the day she stepped off the Clapham bus was passing meditatively along the Walk as she disappeared up Cheyne Row. He thought to himself, "There she is!" and noted with approval the grace and vigour of her body in its plain blue dress. He was a model of fidelity, and broad-minded in a heavy metropolitan way, but he often reflected upon the queerness of the world as he listened outside some studio to the music and laughter, or saw some door open to let out a young woman while the artist in his soiled smock enjoyed a cigarette before returning to his solitude. It really was, this policeman considered, a remarkably odd business for a young woman to take up. Still, half-a-crown an hour was jolly good pay. But when he thought of what they had to do—well, he reiterated his contention that it was a queer world.

Oblivious of these extremely respectable sentiments, Lena reached Glebe Place and rang the bell of the Bayliss studio before she could accuse herself of boldness. Indeed, since she had stood before Miss Braybrooke's door on Sunday evening she had remained unconscious of that unending apprehension

of the neighbours' opinion which seemed to afflict everybody at home. Here she was hurrying up the street without her hat and knocking at a strange man's door to invite him to come to her room late at night! Put that way, she supposed she had a bad strain in her character and would end in some great trouble. And yet . . .

The door opened and George Bayliss, after staring hard at her in a disturbed yet not unfriendly way, turned his head and said over his shoulder:

"Well, here she is, Mr. Heath. Here is your daughter to speak for herself."

Lena fell back a pace and put her hand in a rare and unfamiliar gesture to her mouth. George Bayliss, a peculiar expression on his good-looking face, motioned her to enter. She went in. A sigh of relief rose to her lips as she saw that Hazel and not her mother had accompanied her father.

He was sitting, wrapped in a sort of helpless majesty on the sofa by the little iron stove, his silk hat beside him, his fat white hands folded upon the top of the thick umbrella between his tremendously curving thighs. The massive Assyrian beard lay flat on his bosom; it had the homogeneous texture of sculpture and the solidity of woven fabric. He was bald save for the gray above and behind the ears. The gaze of his full bloodshot brown eyes travelled slowly across the wide floor to Lena's feet and rose to examine her face.

Hazel had risen quickly when Lena came in, a

trace of subdued amusement in her expression, as though she had been laughing before the door opened. Lena looked at her first, and assumed a pose of steady self-defence, the pose that, after she married Leslie Courtney and went away with him to America, became an attitude of belligerent animosity toward the entire world beyond their own private passion. Hazel regarded her sister with astonishment. She had reached an understanding of the situation and her father had not. Her father sat there now like a symbol of inarticulate and bewildered paternity. He was a survival of an age when fecundity was an intrinsic virtue that could compensate for spiritual and material failure. He sat there before the two tender and beautiful beings who had sprung from his own loins, and he had no conception of their characters beyond a doubt of the durability of their chastity. It was some faint suspicion of this that inspired the moods of the two girls. They were conscious of a sense of grotesque injustice in their hearts as they beheld the author of their being and comprehended the brittle quality of his esteem. "My little girls," he was wont to call them, and the phrase assumed a sinister significance to them as they stood, tall and pulsating with their own life, above him. But they had not expected that he would remain under that hallucination, and the cords of their hearts tightened as he looked vaguely for his hat and settled his long white wool scarf, and rising slowly to his feet beckoned with a circular gesture and said:

"We'd better be moving. I always have a cold if I'm out late. I can't afford to take any chances. Come along, Lena. Where"—he stopped and looked at her, with his large eyes full upon her and very prominent in his face— "where is your hat?"

"Father, you don't understand. I'm not—I'm not coming. I'm staying here."

"Staying here?" he repeated, and turning slowly upon his heels he extended his umbrella toward George Bayliss. "Then it is true, after all," he whispered; "you have taken my daughter."

"Oh, *Father!*" exclaimed Hazel, putting her hand to her chin, and gazing hopelessly at him from under bent brows.

"Yes!" said Mr. Heath aloud. "You think I don't see anything. *I* know what all this means. It means the ruin of girls. Men like me bring up families for men like you. I know, I tell you. Are you coming?" he asked suddenly, bringing the umbrella round to Lena. She shook her head.

"I don't care what you say, Father; I'm going to earn my living, and you have no right to say such things to Mr. Bayliss. He has been very kind—— Oh!" And she put her hands to her eyes in a simple and beautiful attitude of grief.

The umbrella swung round to Hazel, who was looking at Mr. Bayliss and admiring him for his quiet poise.

"I believe you had something to do with this," remarked Mr. Heath drearily. "Lena would never

have done this by herself. The two of you—and your mother the way she is. Think of it! And we went round the Inner Circle twice and then went to Chelsea Station and had such a long bus ride. There is something suspicious about it."

Hazel smiled, and so, in spite of himself, did George Bayliss. He interposed, stroking his moustache.

"Mr. Heath, I think you will have another view of this in the morning. Let me get you a cab. I insist, at my expense. As for Miss Lena, she can call on my wife at any time, and I assure you she will have no difficulty in earning a living."

"Offer me money, do you?" said Mr. Heath, lowering the umbrella.

"Well, no, I don't propose to do that," said George Bayliss, smiling again.

"You can't buy me, you know," Mr. Heath said rather more loudly, and looked down at the broad expanse of his beard. "Everybody knows me at South Barnet. Everybody respects me. Twenty-two years in South Barnet. You'd be glad to have *my* reputation, I dare say."

"Father!" said Hazel again.

"I ask you once for all, are you coming, Lena? or never darken the door again. No daughter of mine you'll be, remember."

"I tell you I'm going to be on my own and earn my living," said Lena steadily and without heat. "I'm not going to be a slavey any longer. I'm sorry, Father, but I'll earn all I can and send you some to

help Mother, but I can't stay at home any more. You shouldn't ask it."

"Shouldn't ask it!" he repeated in a puzzled way, and looking at George Bayliss he added: "See what you've done to her. She says I shouldn't ask it."

"I told you before, my good man, I did not bring her here; I used no influence to keep her here; and I decline to be saddled with the responsibility. I have two daughters of my own," the artist remarked, "and I imagine I realize parental obligations as well as you do."

"There, Father!" said Hazel in distress.

The old man looked round vaguely, made as if to speak, but moved slowly across the studio in silence, as though he had forgotten the errand that had brought him to so strange a place. He paused by a canvas leaning against the wall near the door, a drawing of a slim dancer in yellow and black, and examined it absently.

"Father!" said Lena, "don't you want to see where I live?"

"Come, Father," said Hazel.

"I'm always bad when I travel by train," he said simply. "I think I am ill. And when your mother —you know—I am bad, too. I think I had better go home. Take my arm, Hazel."

He groped for Hazel's arm as though it were dark, and when he had found it he put on his hat with a half-forgotten air of rakish defiance and went out into

Glebe Place walking rather fast, and even when Lena called out again to him he ignored her, walking right on as Hazel led, as though he had wiped the other girl from his memory and, indeed, had forgotten everything save the desire to get back to the place where he had vegetated for so many years.

"Your sister is clever," said George Bayliss to Lena, as he prepared to leave.

"Is she? Yes, she has written a novel."

"Oh, I didn't mean that, my child! Has she indeed? I mean she understands her father."

"He's very fond of Mother," said Lena stubbornly, her instinct thrusting out against the alien's criticism of the tribe.

"Oh, of course. I don't presume to comment. But I think you have done the right thing. Your sister live at home?"

Lena nodded. "She talks of coming to London, but—I don't know. Will you come round this evening, Mr. Bayliss? Adela Braybrooke sent me to ask. Only a few friends."

"Yes, I'll come, after dinner," he replied, shrugging his shoulders to settle his coat, and picking up his hat. "Mr. Courtney be there?"

"Oh, yes," said Lena and looked away. George Bayliss laughed and lit a cigarette.

"Little Lena, little Lena, do you like him?"

Lena did not reply, but went toward the door in some agitation.

"Well," said Bayliss, following her and reaching

in front to unlatch the door, "you are just the sort of girl he needs."

"What sort of girl?" she muttered.

"Character. Sit on his head when he needs it," he replied gruffly. "By the way," he added, "I suppose you know——" He paused.

"What?" she demanded.

"Why, that he can't draw. What he needs is a girl to tell him so. And wake him up. Well, I'll see you later."

Lena walked steadily down to the River, thinking.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE days that followed the sudden collapse of Perkins, Perkins and Partners by the death of Mr. Farquharson, Louis Chaillu found himself in the midst of stimulating and diverse forces. When he looked back at that time from the distant and unbelievably strange world of Central America, he contemplated it as a dream. There was activity of all kinds, yet the prevailing memory was that of a sleepwalker moving upon a vaguely understood ramble. It was as though he had passed through a region of transition between the harsh and dingy life of England and the new and magnificent existence between the volcanoes and the sea.

There was activity, and Francis Striker revealed himself somewhat to his familiars in the transactions that ensued. For him Louis and Swayne were merely intelligent pawns, and there was relief as well as surprise in Swayne's mind that Francis had no interest in the fate of Perkins, Perkins and Partners. Francis had other fish to fry. The scene that took place while Louis was at Brighton with Marie Slazenger was the turning point in their fortunes. Close upon the telegram from Surbiton reporting the sudden illness and death of Mr. Farquharson, there

came into the office a short stocky gentleman whose bald head and vigorously moulded features were well enough known to them all. He was Mr. James Rouken, a Scot settled in London. He was a contractor, and his business, modest and growing, was about to be converted into a company with an eminent engineer on the board as a director. His errand to Perkins, Perkins and Partners had nothing to do with this, however. He needed an extra set of plans for some work he was doing for Farquharson, and it was his genial custom in such cases, instead of having them done outside or in his own office, to get them from Francis. "If three guineas will cover the cost of your time," he would say, rolling his r's with musical deliberation, and Francis would do the work. Mr. Rouken posted the three guineas in his private notebook as "goodwill."

On this eventful morning, however, it was impossible to avoid apprising him of what had happened, and he was furthermore interested in the Northern Railway of Costaragua by reason of a dredger his firm had sent out to the order of Orlando Perkins and for which they had not been paid. Swayne was closeted with Mr. Farquharson's lawyer in the inner office and the boy was out on an errand when Mr. Rouken and Francis Striker had a brief and momentous conversation.

"Just let the tracings go for the present," he said slowly, when the news was told. "There's this matter of the dredger now. I'd a letter from downstairs,

the Commissioner of Works, you understand, that the matter of payment would have to stand over until the estate of Mr. Perkins was probated. Now that's all right; but it's the concession for the Railway I'm thinking about, and I'd be obliged if you could give me a tip as to whether it's likely to be taken up over here. There's no doubt there's more than a dredger needed by those who'll buy the concession."

"I know all about that concession," said Francis in a low voice. "I have been through the papers a great many times. What would it be worth to you?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Rouken simply. "It's too far away for me."

"What I meant was," said Francis, "suppose it was worth something—what would you call a fair price for it, as a speculation?"

"I see, I see," said Mr. Rouken, eyeing Francis carefully. "You'd buy it, perhaps?"

"There's something in it," replied Francis. "The thing hasn't been treated seriously. "I believe it could be made a good thing."

"Look you here, Mr. Striker. Will you take lunch with me to-day?"

Francis looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock.

"I play footer at three," he muttered. "Shall we say twelve? My friend isn't here this morning."

"Suppose you meet me at the Trocadero at twelve fifteen."

If Mr. Rouken had any notion of seeing Francis

Striker eat a lunch in proportion to his size, he was disappointed. The young man ate some soup and then asked for a slice of very rare beef. After this he took a piece of cheddar and drank a glass of water.

"Now," said Mr. Rouken, lighting a cigar and taking no notice of his guest's refusal of a liqueur, "what are your ideas about this railway?"

"Only that if I had a partner with money, I'd take it up," said Francis, folding his arms on the table. "You see, I am twenty-one and I have a certain amount of money. My friend Louis Chaillu is not of age yet, but I know his father would allow him to invest something. But we would need more than we have to take up a thing like this."

"Then perhaps you have the notion of going out there?" hazarded Mr. Rouken.

"Just that," said Francis, looking up; "but it is no good without someone here to back it."

"Like me, let us suppose," said Mr. Rouken.

"You say it is too far for you."

"Oh, I'm not saying I wouldn't think of it if I had someone out there I could trust," said Mr. Rouken. "It might be a good investment. I'm a great believer in that part of the world when the Canal is cut."

"As it will be, by someone, even if they go through Nicaragua," said Francis, who had been reading the matter up.

"As you say," agreed Mr. Rouken. "Now, Mr. Striker, I've a notion you and I can do business together."

Francis took a packet of papers from his pocket, held by a broad rubber band, and looked round.

"We'll go up to the lounge," said Mr. Rouken, and he led the way, his short stout legs moving briskly up the stairs.

His opinion of the young man rose when he heard the ensuing remarks. Francis read him a précis of the concession, a list of contracts entered into by Orlando Perkins and Co. of San Benito, recited the the legislation brought in during the previous twenty years by the Costaraguan Government dealing with the control of immigration and the foreign interests, and finally he unfolded some sheets of blue paper covered with figures showing the cost per mile if the road were carried farther east along the coast on a bridge over the Corcubion River, through the rich cattle district between Albatorre and the vineyards of Mount Cornaru, over the shoulder of Cornaru to the Corcubion again and up the gorge to the San Benito plateau. On one sheet was a map of the route. "Adds forty miles of easy work, you see," he remarked slowly, "but it avoids the main trouble."

"Why haven't they done this before?" demanded Mr. Rouken, crouching over the map.

"Well, for several reasons," said Francis succinctly. "One was Mr. Perkins's wish to have the railway come up from the coast to his place at Albatorre. There the cattle men are all very rich and conservative and they cannot understand why a railway is needed at all. They think it will make their people

dissatisfied. I say, Mr. Rouken, do you know what the men on the ranches get just now?"

Mr. Rouken, studying Francis very keenly, shook his head.

"Fourpence a day, in our money. Bustillo told me."

"Did he though?" murmured Mr. Rouken, still studying Francis. "And what other reasons are there?"

"This," said Francis, leaning forward and rubbing his nose with his knuckles, "the men on the job are being paid to keep the thing hanging in the air—politics."

"Yes," said Mr. Rouken, knocking his cigar ash into the tray, "that's what I was waiting to hear. Now, how are you going to deal with that?"

"Well, if it's possible to get the concession confirmed by the Department of State, I should go right on and I wouldn't take the slightest notice of them."

"Ah, you wouldn't?" Mr. Rouken became quite preoccupied, staring at the big young man who sat close to him unfolding these plans. Mr. Rouken counted among his many qualifications for his position as a successful contractor a knowledge of character, and he was very interested in Francis. He had the wit to see that Francis could not be hired. He leaned forward and spoke slowly and weightily for a few moments, his hand on his young friend's knee. Then he sat back and waited for an answer.

Francis Striker apparently had no answer ready.

He leaned his head on his hand and contemplated his large, well-made shoe. He revealed neither conceit nor panic at this important moment of his life. He passed his tongue over his lips and said:

"We'll do that, if you can get rid of Sir Kenneth."

"Get rid of Sir Kenneth?" echoed Mr. Rouken. "Why, I've had no end of trouble inducing him to be chairman of the board of directors. What are you talking about?"

"It's no good having those sort of chaps," said Francis. "He's on fifty boards now, and I know what Mr. Farquharson always said of such men. He said they are only a nuisance."

"Well, upon my word!" said Mr. Rouken. "And who's to be chairman?"

"Why, yourself, I should say," retorted the young man; and he added: "I'm jolly sure nobody else would be chairman of *my* company but myself, I can tell you!"

"Upon my worrd!" repeated Mr. Rouken, and he passed his hand over his shining poll. "With the exception of Sir Kenneth, you'll agree to my proposals?"

"Yes," said Francis. "By the way, is he putting anything in besides his name?" As Mr. Rouken did not reply, he went on, "As I thought. Well, his name won't get contracts, you know. He must have scores round him."

"Have you met him?" demanded Mr. Rouken.

"I've heard him speak at the Civils," said Francis.

"And what was your opinion?"

"He spoke very well," replied Francis unexpectedly. "I suppose you know, Mr. Rouken, that Sir Kenneth McGowan is going to stand for Parliament in the Conservative interests at the next election?"

"No, I didn't," admitted Mr. Rouken. "And where did you hear that?"

"It was in the *Morning Post.* How much attention will we get from him when he becomes M.P.? And a Conservative M.P. at that."

"H-m," remarked Mr. Rouken. "Well, I'll tell you what we'll do. I must talk this over with my brother-in-law, who is my present partner, and if, as I believe, he falls in with the idea of having a foreign branch, we'll invite you and your friend to join the board if we can get the concession at your figure."

"Not my friend," said Francis. "He is too young and he does not understand business. He will have a salary. How many shares will you allot to us?"

"How many do you wish?"

Francis pinched his lips with his thumb and finger. He was enjoying in a mild way the surprise of Mr. Rouken. He saw that even Mr. Rouken was unprepared for a young man with an undivided ambition. Francis had been an industrious apprentice without taking the trouble to call any one's attention to his industry. Indeed, he was largely unaware of this quality in himself, because he was preoccupied so completely with vague schemes of shadowy grandeur. The things that caused Mr. Rouken a little doubt and

uneasiness were the obliviousness with which the young man had listened to the proposition and the nature of his comments upon Sir Kenneth. It is almost impossible for a middle-aged man to appreciate shrewdness in youth. And Francis was that. It was his major, dominating faculty. The simplicity and directness of his own character derived, not from a serene pity or a good-natured stupidity, but from intelligence. Francis, in his own phrase, which he never used save to himself, was looking about him all the time. He possessed the flair for commercial enterprise that has all the magical and ethereal elfishness of genius. And just as the latent powers of a painter or poet make for dreaming indolence, so Francis beguiled the early years of his career with dreams and ponderings of colossal achievements, watching the peaceful world roll by, untroubled with those cares the world imagines to be the peculiar burden of money-makers, and storing his incondite mind with financial facts. He had instinctively laid hold of the truth that so many young men in professions fail to see at all—that behind every professional enterprise there is money. In England there was a tendency to conceal this truth, so that there arose a species of innocent snobbishness among young men concerning cost and the position of money. Even his father was not so free from this cant that the making of money carried a stigma.

And yet, strangely enough, it was the shrewdness of Francis that appealed most irresistibly to the con-

tractor—that and the equipped intelligence that had laid its plans and was prepared to tackle and conquer a distant problem on so large a scale. Mr. Rouken found his confidence captured. He felt himself ready to back the young man. He was very far from being a philanthropist in the narrow sense, and he was thinking of himself when he agreed, with secret satisfaction, to give the young man his chance.

"The number of shares," said Francis quietly, "is not so important as the contract. I think it ought to be five years at least."

"To complete?"

"No, as a basis. By that time we shall know where we are."

"We'll hope so," said Mr. Rouken drily. "You can spend a lot of money in five years."

"Yes, you can."

"Tell me, Mr. Striker, if I hadn't made this proposition to you, what would you have done? You say you have not the money to do it alone."

"I'll tell you that if you tell me this," said Francis slowly and distinctly. "Where would I be if I did tell you and something cropped up to prevent you going in on the deal? You'd have my plans and I—well, I don't suppose we need go into that, what?"

"Upon my worrd!" said Mr. Rouken, not for the first time. "You have a head on your shoulders."

"You see, Mr. Rouken, there's nothing much doing in England, and I have been thinking for a long while of making a start abroad. But it's no use slaving

away all one's life as resident engineer for somebody who doesn't give a darn whether the job gets done or not. And it's no use expecting anything else if you haven't someone with money to back you and bank on you. Everything nowadays is—financial, I should say," he added in a lower tone.

"Oh! That's the size of it. Now what are you going to do?"

Francis outlined his plan. A cable to San Benito, offering from Rouken and Co. so much cash for the concession for building the Northern Railway of Costaragua to be completed in five years.

"Will they take any notice of it?" asked Mr. Rouken.

"As a rule, notice is taken of a cash offer," said Francis drily. "But what I'm banking on is that Mr. Orlando Perkins was more or less of a country gentleman sort of person, and it is quite on the cards that cash will be welcome. Bustillo tells me there are people there with estates as big as Surrey and without a ten-pound note in the place."

"And then?" said Rouken.

"Well, a draft, I should say, to make sure. Then, as soon as you can draw the papers, I can start. I think I shall have to send a wire to Putney to say I can't play to-day. There will be a great deal to go over, you know. I must check all these figures again. And I must have a long talk with Bustillo. I'll go to Hampstead to-night."

"Are you going to tell him about the concession?"

"I shall say I am employed by the purchasers to go out and make a report. That is really what it amounts to."

Mr. Rouken, who had paid for the lunch, agreed, and outside in Shaftesbury Avenue they parted, Francis promising to see the other at his office Monday morning.

About them surged the Saturday matinée crowds, those crowds so different, so much more cheerful than any others, the crowds with their week's work done, their week's wages in their pockets, fed and at leisure for the delights of the theatre and the dalliance of sex. Many a girl looked demure as Francis strode toward Leicester Square and on to Charing Cross, where he hoped to find the offices of the steam-packet company open. Some looked over their shoulder and watched in vain for him to notice their signal. And if they were disppointed it was not because Francis was insensible to the beauty of women. It was simply that to him at this time there were neither men nor women about him, but forces. For him the present was not the concrete radiance in which these cheerful wage-earners existed. For him there would never be any paymaster save himself! He was absorbed, as the throngs thrust against him, in dreams of what can only be called power. It is a popular modern fallacy that only the people have power. Francis Striker was more correctly informed. Power, he was instinctively aware, came from within. Nothing could keep it for you or give it to you, if

you lacked the internal faculty of apprehending it. And he hurried through the week-end swarms entirely conscious of his ability to encounter a great destiny, but filled with a sort of stage fright at the approach of his entrance upon the stage.

His attitude toward Louis at this time was not easy to account for to himself. It was compounded of affection and admiration, yet it never occurred to him to admit Louis to a full intimacy on the subject of his ambition. His remark to Mr. Rouken that Louis would have a salary was based on a shrewd judgment of his friend's character. As an *aide*, as a technical adviser, as a friend to turn to for sympathy in minor matters, Louis was first in his friend's regard. But in those greater visions, visions that comprised power, and perhaps wealth, Francis left Louis out of it. Up there he was alone. Up there all men are alone! The air is too thin, the risks too great, the solitary ecstasy too keen, to make another worth while. And when it transpired that Louis was away on one of his frequent week ends, Francis accepted the fact as confirming his own affectionate estimate of a valuable yet inferior character, one to be controlled and driven, and manipulated by a first-class mind.

So it happened that by reason of the simplicity of his aim, and his fortunate immunity from the enervating influence of women, Francis suffered less than Louis when the decision was made, and they became identified with the new firm of James Rouken Lim-

ited, Contractors, London and Plymouth. Francis was suddenly discovered by those about him to be rootless and without ties. Among the servants at the Lodge it was Master Louis who was discussed with interest and affection. Only Mrs. Striker grew pensive as her dream came true and her youngest-born prepared to test his thews and sinews against Fate. Mr. Striker had long before become reconciled to his son's defection from Striker and Selby. That firm was growing larger and more prosperous every year, and Albert and Nicholas were less and less anxious to have Francis share with them. They hoped he would do well in Costaragua. Indeed, the Strikers had maintained their position as an almost ideal well-bred family. The component parts of that family moved in their grooves like the polished rollers of an admirably designed bearing, keeping their alignment and accepting their allotted load without ever touching each other. But while they hoped Francis would do well in Costaragua, they had but the vaguest notion what it was he proposed to do there, or where Costaragua might be. Francis did not shine at home. Indeed, beyond attending church on Sunday morning, his activities were confined to dining more or less in good-natured silence and in retiring to his room to study or sleep. He played Rugby football and cricket somewhere in West London and was what Albert called "rather a beefer." That he had brains was not believed; that he might have genius of some sort would have been

regarded as an amusing hallucination. And it was this exhaustion of the social atmosphere that was sending Englishmen across the sea. When Eudoxia Bustillo turned up her nose at the young men of her set and concentrated on her career, she formed a part of that subterranean energy that was loosening and disintegrating English life. The Strikers came and went, with their inheritance of good breeding and decent ideals, without questioning each other, and the very perfection of the family life was destined to be the origin of its dissolution.

But with Louis it was not so. Having no family, he achieved with a charming lightness those affiliations that inspire loyalty and affection. Even old Mr. Kitching, at work among the shrubs, where his large red beard resembled a new and awful horticultural production, would raise his hand with a stiff gesture that was none the less spontaneous and sincere. And while this meant, perhaps, very little to Louis while he moved easily along a primrose way of work that was easy because he liked it, and play that was easy because others liked him, it complicated his emotions when he felt the full significance of departure. And it caused him a profound uneasiness when he found the thought of Hazel Heath recurring constantly to his mind while the more pretentious and recent friendships receded or turned out to be lath and plaster.

This was the more puzzling to him because, as they had grown up, it seemed as though their lives

would never again come together. They would pass in the street on Sunday with a faint smile, almost of embarrassment. She, the humble little creature behind Mrs. Salisbury's stuffy counter, grew slender and tall, and pride kept her from any other acknowledgment of his existence save a stiff nod. He, ranging the Metropolis for pleasure and business, often forgot those early sentiments and the elfin girl who had shared them. Dwelling in different streets, and even in different worlds, yet the unconscious currents of their lives were flowing in perilous proximity. It was when Louis beheld his own life stripped to the essentials by the energy and decision of his friend that he saw Hazel standing sharp and clear, unknown yet familiar, in the dismantled chambers of his heart.

"You're dreaming," said Francis one evening as they walked in the garden, the leaves falling softly about them.

"I know," said Louis. "I shall miss everything here."

"Don't you want to go then?" demanded Francis. "And leave all your sweethearts?" he added with an almost soundless laugh.

Louis looked at his friend with an expression of fear on his face. There had been times of late when he had glimpsed the obscure depths of his friend's character. Only the other day Francis had said implacably, "Every shilling you have!" and Louis had been aware of a feeling that he was stumbling

in the dark against something hard and cold. Now he was afraid again, and he concealed it by an assumption of dignity.

"Why should that bother you?" he asked. "You've never wanted to cut me out."

"That's true, anyhow," admitted Francis. "Not in my line, I'm afraid. By the way, old chap, have you really kept up the Spanish you started?"

"Yes, I have," replied Louis. "Old Mrs. Bustillo said to me not long ago: 'Three months in the country and you will speak like a native'——"

"Three months in what country?" asked Francis in a harsh tone.

"Why, Spain, of course, I suppose."

"Oh, I see. Mind you say nothing to the Bustillos about our plans. I thought at one time you were going to fall in love with Eudoxia."

"Fall in love with her yourself," said Louis. "She's like you in many ways."

"Is she? I didn't know that. I thought you were after her. You used to see her home, I remember."

"Do you remember everything, Francis?"

"Yes, practically, if I want to," replied Francis without egotism. "I can remember, for instance, you were gone on that Heath kid when you first came back. *You've* forgotten, I suppose."

"No, indeed I haven't forgotten!" said Louis with the old catch in his voice that amused Francis and made him regard his friend with romantic affection. "That's just the trouble. I shall never forget."

"Now, now!" warned Francis. "Just as we are going away!"

"It is the going away that has shown me how much I care for her," said Louis, and he added with unconscious irony, "I didn't see it before."

"Well, if you're thinking of messing everything up——!" exclaimed Francis, and then he stopped, beset by a sudden thought that, apart from his own personal idiosyncrasy, there was no real reason why Louis should be reproached. He went on thinking, and Louis wondered what had caused the sudden silence. Francis was a long way off now, indulging in one of those far-sighted contemplations of the future that were the source of his extraordinary self-possession and control when that future became the present.

"Now *you*'re dreaming," observed Louis drily.

"Eh? Yes. But I say, old chap, we'd better go out and see what we have to tackle first, eh? Rather important for us, you know, don't you think?"

"Oh, of course. But I know what I'm talking about, mind you, and I'm going to ask Hazel Heath to marry me."

"Well," said Francis, suddenly regaining full possession of his faculties at this grandiose speech, "why don't you?"

There was no reply to this. Louis could not have said that Marie Slazenger, of all people, had shown him his own mind. He could scarcely express the sudden perception he had of Hazel as a soul mate when

he found he would have to sever the ties that bound him to England. But the curt capable voice repeating the words, "Why don't you?" echoed in his mind now, and nerved him to find Hazel again and test the validity of his intuitions.

But Hazel, though she lived just up the street and worked over on the New Parade near the Railway Bridge, was not so easy to come by. There was no telephone system in those days, save in a few offices. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the seclusion and isolation of each separate soul in a country like England in the last century. The framework of society was designed to protect the individual, and the barriers, though invisible, were difficult to surmount or penetrate. And it was only a lucky accident that enabled Louis one evening to meet Hazel and speak to her, though they had been in each other's thoughts for so long.

And at first, as she hurried past him, he did not know her. That slim elegant young person in black, with a feather boa round her neck and a trim hat with a red feather on her dark head, suddenly encountered, seemed a stranger. He halted in the green and orange glow outside the chemist's shop on the Parade and saw her glance over her shoulder and hurry on into the darkness toward Haythorne Road. And he hurried after her, his pulse beating, his heart charged with a delicious remorse.

"Hazel!" he called, and she stopped at once to let him come up. Her eyes shone behind the glasses and

a veil she was wearing. "I've been wanting to see you so much."

"Yes?" she answered with apparent amusement and surprise.

"Oh, please!" he protested. "I mean it. Will you let me come for a walk with you?"

"If it's not putting you out," she said sweetly.

"No," he replied in a low tone, "it is not putting me out. Let us go this way, toward Sybil Fosters. What I was thinking—it might put you out."

"How do you mean? I'll go for a walk if you want me to."

"Hazel," he muttered. "Hazel!"

She looked at him over her shoulder. Her face beneath the veil was piquant and smiling and mysterious.

"Goodness!" she whispered. "What's the matter?"

"I wanted to ask you something," he answered, "but I thought perhaps—well, I've been rather a rotter and it would serve me right if——"

"If what?" she asked, looking down.

"Well, if there was someone else."

For a while they walked on in silence, the great oaks all about them, the lights in the valley shining peacefully below.

"No, Louis," Hazel said at length; "I'm not going with anybody. I—I don't think I'll ever."

"Hazel! Dear, I want you. Why do you say that?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said fretfully. "I want a career, and that's about all it comes to—wanting! I'm stuck at home and—oh, what's the use of talking?"

"What makes you like this? Anything wrong?"

Hazel was walking along very fast and she was looking straight in front of her. There were tears in her eyes, and she did not want him to see them. She did not want him to know that the publishers of "Agatha's Victory" had written a horrible letter to say that Miss Heath's manuscript, "Crossing the Bar," while it had distinction, did not impress them as being likely to appeal to a large public, and they therefore were sending it to her address. It was agonizing to think of it on its way back to her, that brown-paper parcel of shabby foolscap. And she could not tell Louis how the humiliation and the sense of being a failure made her weak and tottery, so that, if he only had known it, she wanted to put her head on his shoulder and cry.

"No, nothing much," she muttered, and she added softly:

"You said you wanted to ask me something," and immediately she was conscious of an arm round her shoulders.

"Yes," he said, and he began to speak in a low rapid tone of what had befallen him, how he and his friend Francis Striker had gone into a big business contract that was taking them both away to Costaragua and they might be away for a long while,

perhaps for years, and he was miserable about leaving England without seeing her again. And then, without giving her time to answer, Louis asked her if she would consent to wait for him.

She turned her head and looked up at him, her bright eyes brighter still with the unshed tears in them, and her thin cheeks were glowing.

"To be married," he whispered, and bent his head. "Will you, dear?"

He was young, and his destiny carried him a long way and to many harbours before he found rest from adventure, but he had an inborn and possibly inherited aptitude for simulating fidelity. He never comprehended any other standard of emotion save his own. He found it easy to deceive and be deceived because he always deceived himself. And he developed, too, that curious romantic quality of appearing true while he achieved a plurality of conquests. But always he believed in his sincerity, and when he stood on the brink of parting with his first love, he trembled with the strength of his desires.

And she trembled also, as she pressed her slim body against him and thought of the Kapellmeister's faery daughter and the young duke. The memory of that adolescent fancy came with a throb of pain and ecstasy, and she smiled the smile of the girl who remembers her lover while she is with him. She closed her eyes as she whispered and paused to touch her lips lightly to his cheek.

"You've been a long time, Louis dear."

"I know," he said, "I know. I didn't understand until this happened, darling. How lucky I am that there is nobody else."

She eyed him gravely.

"I thought you were going to marry that grand Miss Selby," she said, touching his hair and experiencing the thrill for the first time in her life.

"How could you think that? She is engaged."

"Who to?" she asked, interested at once.

"Oh, I'm blessed if I know. Some Johnny whose pater is an alderman, I think. She was supposed to marry my friend Francis, but he's very funny about girls."

"How do you mean—funny?" she demanded.

"Well, he never looks at them," said Louis.

"I shouldn't call it funny," said Hazel. "Was it his example kept you away from me?"

"Oh, Hazel dear!"

They stood together in the darkness, in a dream of exquisite desires and passionate illusions until the great bells of the church tower across the valley clanged out the hour in a torrent of reverberating harmonies.

"Do you remember, Louis, how you frightened me that time?" she asked as the air grew still again.

"When I thought you were a dryad?"

"Do you know what I thought you were?" she asked suddenly, smiling archly.

"No, what?"

"Oh, I can't tell you," she laughed, thinking of the

Kapellmeister's daughter and her thrilling romance. Even to Louis it was impossible to confess that hallucination of her dream world.

"Someone very nice?"

"Yes, it was, and yet—he was someone who was untrue to his sweetheart," she murmured, putting her arms round his neck and making a little inarticulate noise of utter content. "Louis, don't be very long, will you?"

"I'll come back as soon as I can, and we'll be married and go out there and live in a *hacienda* on the mountains of Albatorre," he told her. "Will you like that, Hazel dear?"

"Oh, Louis, I'll be horribly miserable all the time you're away. I'll think you'll be falling in love with those Spanish girls. I shall hate it."

"No fear!" he said, laughing. "I'll write to you every post."

"Will you?" she breathed, holding him tight and breathing quickly, her head flung back.

"Of course! And I say, Hazel, Francis knows about us, but no one else. Are you going to tell your people?"

She closed her eyes as she shook her head.

"No," she whispered. "I am thinking of going away to London. I mean I was. I don't know whether I shall now." She was thinking of that calamitous letter from the publishers. "Anyhow, I don't get on with my family a bit. There are so many of us, you know."

"Yes," he answered, "and you'll not tell anybody? It will be a secret between us two. And I'll come back all of a sudden and you'll surprise them by getting married!"

"Oh, Louis!" She relaxed against him in an ecstasy of anticipation. For a moment Hazel was a simple suburban girl without a trace of the sharp little genius who had written "Round Our Corner" or "Agatha's Victory" or "Crossing the Bar."

"And Hazel, let's do a theatre some night. Not a music hall or Empire. We'll go to dinner at a place I know, and then the Gaiety, or the Shaftesbury."

"Lovely," she said, thinking of the future, when he would come back to claim her and she would be married in St. Peter's Church, not the chapel at all, and have bridesmaids and perhaps a page, like Miss Lucia Striker had when she married young Mr. Gifford; and then in a going-away dress of gray satin she would drive off to London and a seaport and sail to a distant land. It was all lovely, and loveliest of all was keeping it a secret.

But it was not easy, for all that. Only the next day Mrs. Giffel boomed out in her hearty way as she passed the ribbon counter, "Hullo! Somebody left you a fortune?" And the matter seemed all the more mysterious to Mrs. Giffel when she heard that "Crossing the Bar" had come back.

"Oh, Lord!" said the lady. "As bad as that? I suppose if they'd accepted it you'd be wearing sackcloth and ashes."

And Hazel, when she had to take an afternoon off and accompany her father down to Chelsea, had this tremendous secret locked up in her breast. She had been out with Louis that evening when Lena had gone. She had been so busy with her own thoughts that until she saw Mrs. Giffel stare fixedly at her mother with dropping jaw, Hazel herself had never suspected the misfortune that was about to befall them. And when she stood in the studio of George Bayliss and saw Lena's face, she knew Lena had a profounder reason for leaving home than anything that might happen at Haythorne Terrace. It was Hazel's rapt obliviousness to what they were doing that caused them to get in the wrong trains on the Underground and go all the way to Aldgate and back to Putney in the effort to reach Chelsea. And Hazel had been aghast at her father. Instead of becoming older and more feeble at the shock of Lena's dogged desire to earn her living, he seemed to recover a strange and absurd youthfulness. Going home, he had taken Hazel's arm and droned into her ear. It was like hearing a middle-aged stranger talking. The lights of London, the roar of the trains, the shuffle and thrust of the homeward-bound throngs must have got into his blood or gone to his head. He began to surge forward, too, pushing Hazel along until she was frightened.

"Your mother!" he said, when Hazel protested. "She doesn't like being left alone." And he stopped at the corner of the Gray's Inn Road before crossing

to enter King's Cross Station. He stared at the glaring lights of the taverns and oyster saloons, at the great omnibuses rumbling down Pentonville to the Euston Road, and the tramcars taking on their crowds for Holloway and beyond, and he held tightly to Hazel's arm.

"Ah!" he muttered. "This London! Bad, bad! We must get back home to your mother." The thought of his wife seemed to keep him alive; he started across the street and then stepped back. He raised his voice against the roar of the traffic on the granite roadway.

"Twenty-one years," he shouted in Hazel's ear. "Twenty-one years man and wife. And never apart for a single day, never a cross word. And Lena thinks she knows more than her parents. Little Lena. Oh, the ingratitude!"

And suddenly he began to hurry across the street while Hazel ran after him, and he stood on the kerb looking round in a dazed way, like a lost, tired child.

CHAPTER V

THOSE words of George Bayliss haunted Lena for a long time after that evening party in the room overlooking the River. She watched for evidence of their truth in the drawings Leslie Courtney showed to her, listened to the remarks of others who knew him. More narrowly did she endeavour to find out what Leslie thought himself. It was not long before she discovered that he was unaware of this important fact, that he could not draw.

She found, too, that he had one of those sanguine temperaments that are difficult to hold down to earth. It was a charm to a girl in love to hear him hold forth as to what he would do, but Lena's was a tough and practical mind that continually brought him up standing with a brusque contradiction. As when he said, standing in front of the fireplace waving a pipe and explaining how the dealers did you in the eye:

"You've got to have something of your own," he argued. "Now if I only had, say, two pound a week, I could lick 'em all."

"Why not lick them without the two pound a week?" she cut in, her head bent over the curtain she was making.

"Oh, you don't understand, Lena. There's studio rent and models and so on perhaps for months before you make a hit. If I could only get hold of a really good idea for a set of picture postcards, why there's a fortune in it!"

"Is there?" she asked sullenly. She didn't know or understand much about it, as he said, but she didn't hear George Bayliss or any other of the big men talking like that, and she wanted Leslie to be like them.

"In a hit, yes," he told her, and went on to describe how men he knew, and he really seemed to know all the artists alive, had made "hits" and were "simply rolling in it." It was not always easy to see what this had to do with art, but the general idea was that, after you had made a hit, you could live on Easy Street and do real art at your leisure.

Lena was a good listener. She never talked in a studio either posing or resting. She carried a book and read it until called for, and when finished she did not hang about, but left at once. This was partly diffidence, but it also sprang from her simple and rather unsophisticated character, which could not endure coquetry.

There was much hunting for something that would be a hit.

But Lena had a terrible shock when Leslie came in early one day and said he had chucked his office job.

"Chucked three pounds a week!" she exclaimed.

"Look here!" he said, and opened a copy of an

illustrated paper called *Phunny Bits*, a journal devoted to humorous travesties and mildly stimulating sketches of ladies in *décolleté* or *déshabille*. He turned the pages until he found a drawing of two comic actors. There was a humorous legend below, and in one corner in small print the words, "Drawn by Leslie Courtney."

Lena looked at it and read the joke. The First Thespian remarked to the other, "Appius Claudius, I believe," and the other replied, "No, miserable as Hamlet. The ghost won't walk."

"What's a Thespian?" she asked, and then without waiting for an answer she went on:

"What did they give you for that?"

"Two guineas. Now if I only do one a week, I can manage splendidly."

"You've got to get one accepted every week," said Lena, who had not listened to studio talk for nothing.

"Oh, well, that's a chance everybody has to take."

"Oh, why did you give up your job?" she cried.

"Look here, Lena, I'm sick of every chap down here calling me a bally amateur. I'm going to have a shot at it. This is a start, and that's what counts. Everybody, pretty nearly, will see this, and the other papers will give me a commission. Look at Phil May. No end of tin, all out of black and white."

There was no use talking to him. Lena found that out through the years that followed. And

that evening after he had got the check cashed there was a grand blow-out of sardine sandwiches and beer, and Leslie showed her a new and astonishing side to his character when the time came to get him home. If he was sanguine in the sober day, he became a seer, a prophet, an inspired monologue in the small hours when the bottles were empty and the dawn began to lighten beyond Battersea. He might satirize the two Lashmores in a drawing, but when the punch bowl was empty, or the party at the Six Bells Tavern in the Kings Road were turned out after midnight, he and they went down the street arm-in-arm toward the River, singing joyously songs that were never before known on earth. They saw each other home until they sat down on the kerb by the Embankment and argued where it would end. Sometimes it ended at dawn in Battersea Park, or even in Hyde Park, when they would strip and swim in the Serpentine and scandalize the sleepy night watchmen.

"It's their way, dearie," Miss Braybrooke would say excusingly as the vocal uproar in the studio below came up to them. "They don't mean any harm, really."

It rather surprised Lena that Leslie at first did get some commissions and carried them out to the satisfaction of the publishers. George Bayliss was very decent and sent some things Leslie's way. Lena would sit and listen to George Bayliss when he had one of his rare conversational fits. He taught her

many things briefly and without egotistical trimmings. He gave her introductions to artists in the Fulham Road and in St. John's Wood, men who paid well because they received large sums for their work. Lena was popular because she was, as one of them remarked, "as near to an intelligent statue as a human being could be." So she was able to get along very well. But she liked George Bayliss best and listened to his words.

"No," he said once, "I admit there is going to be plenty of work for almost anybody who takes the trouble to learn freehand drawing. This advertising is only in its infancy yet. But that has nothing to do with art. Art is a state of mind. You've got it or you haven't got it. If you haven't, nobody can give it you, no matter how hard you work. Sounds brutal, I know, but it's true."

She liked him for being truthful about it.

He taught her to appreciate old things, telling her where chairs and old pieces of crockery could be purchased by the instructed for a few pennies or shillings.

"Beauty is strength," he would say. "See that chair. Every piece tells. Nothing superfluous anywhere. And it is beautiful. Why don't they make them like that now? Well, they don't want to, for one thing. No demand. They want their things all curly pieces, like the Albert Memorial. Go and look at it sometimes, and remember it. It shows you what to avoid."

At another time, in response to a remark she made about bohemian life, he said:

"It doesn't mean anything at all. Most of these fellows you see at these studio parties are failures and sponges. The real men come out and have a good time only now and then. Art is like anything else—you have to work at it."

Leslie Courtney got the benefit of all this advice at second hand. Another friend Lena turned to when she became used to her life in Chelsea was Mr. Semple, Leslie's American acquaintance. George Bayliss said Semple was a fraud, but Lena was not so sure. She felt that down under that extraordinary manner of his, that impression he gave of breathing an intoxicating atmosphere composed of equal parts of oxygen and hope, he was genuine enough. And he certainly admired Leslie enormously. He had carried away one small water colour and sold it somewhere in the West End. George Bayliss admitted this looked real enough, but was not convinced. Like many Englishmen, Bayliss could not stand the American optimism that irradiated Semple like a golden cloud. He found himself resisting that optimism even when it was successful. Of course, he disliked Semple in the first place because he was a buyer of old masters for various persons in America who knew nothing about pictures. He disliked him also because he combined a distressing frankness about his own talents with an embarrassing admiration for the

geniuses he was always meeting. It gave an air of unreality to his manner.

Lena listened to Mr. Semple's artless periods and obtained a great deal of information about various parts of the United States. She also discovered he intended to return to Philadelphia "where he was raised," as he put it, and open "a school of commercial art." Bayliss snorted a little when he heard the phrase, but he laughed afterward.

"Well, that's all the art there will be in a few years' time," he said. "He's frank, I'll admit. Commercial art! Humph!"

Mr. Semple was looking for a partner as well, he told Lena, as he personally didn't feel competent to teach. He thought it would be a good stunt if he had someone with more polish and with "an English accent." Lena was frankly unaware she had an accent, though conscious enough of Mr. Semple's, but she agreed with him Leslie would answer the description of a gentleman.

"Why don't you ask him if he would go?" she said to Mr. Semple one day. Mr. Semple was afraid to suggest it.

"I couldn't ask him to give up his career here," he protested in his elaborate oratorical way. Mr. Semple usually held the lapels of his coat, and one was surprised, on looking down, to find it was not a Prince Albert. His large flexible mouth would remain open after a word, and with his head on one side he seemed to be listening for the echo of his own

voice. Lena noticed he slurred double consonants and flattened the vowels so that his speech at times reminded her of a north-country school-teacher who had been in charge of the Fifth Standard out at South Barnet.

"Never mind; ask him," she urged.

It was never quite clear to any one how far Mr. Semple meant what he said. He seemed to have a meaning, but not always what common folk understood by his words. In this case he promised to do as Lena suggested, and the next thing she heard he had gone to Vienna to attend a sale. She told Leslie, who was sitting in front of his easel by the studio window and smoking a very large pipe with a curved stem, and he answered much more like the Lashmore Brothers than one would have expected.

"If he makes it worth my while," he said.

It was a matter of comment to these two, in years to come, that they drifted into the position of lovers almost without the conventional wooing. It was as though each had taken for granted the thoughts of the other. It was Lena who, when *Phunny Bits* did actually accept another of Leslie's drawings, and he had rushed out and bought a copy—it was Lena who pointed out that he could have saved the penny by waiting until the complimentary copy arrived from the office. It was a rather ruthless thing to do to a sanguine young man, but Lena had that tough strain in her character that made her value a truth only when it was unpalatable. And she never fully

comprehended that it is possible to be aware of the truth about people without having the warrant to utter it. But this dour expression on the part of a girl to whom expression was painful was only the visible portion of a strong character which had its foundations deep down out of sight, and upon which he gradually came to depend for comfort and safety.

"I don't care," she said to Adela Braybrooke after she had been with Leslie to meet his people. "They tried to patronize me and I can't stand that. I'm not marrying his family, am I?"

"Yes, but it'll make it very unpleasant for him, dearie. They reckon he's a good catch, you see."

"Do they?" said Lena, and she began to wonder why those extremely genteel creatures thought so much of themselves.

"Yes, indeed they do," assented Miss Braybrooke with considerable animation. "And they think it's a terrible disgrace to have their brother chasing after models. Or rather, they put it the other way round, I expect, when they talk about it among themselves. I expect they say you've been chasing him."

"I've not. I wouldn't chase anybody!" said Lena angrily.

"You'd never get them to believe it, dearie. You're a model and that settles it for those swells."

But when Leslie's sisters came to return the visit and tried to make Lena feel the privilege she would

have in entering their family, they got very little out of her. She turned to the elder lady, an angularly elegant person with much unusual jewellery, and remarked:

"Yes, I like him, but I don't see where the favour comes in, Miss Courtney. It isn't as if he had a fortune."

"But, my dear girl, surely you can see——" began Miss Courtney, and her sister chimed in with:

"I consider that remark in distinctly bad taste."

"Well, if I had a fortune, you wouldn't try to be so patronizing, would you?" grumbled Lena; and the two ladies looked at each other with raised eyebrows and compressed lips.

"Really!" said the younger, and rose.

"I must say!" said the elder, and rose also.

They went away, maintaining their dignity all the way down the dilapidated stairs and paying no attention to Lena's warning about the last step but two, so that they stumbled a little and flurried each other in the dark entry. They were evidently much older than their brother and regarded him as a piece of family property. Lena spoke to Leslie when he came in, tired and clamouring for a cup of tea, after an unfortunate day calling on art editors. She did not speak harsh'y because she alone of their set in Chelsea knew what pluck it took for him to stick to art work when things were going against him. She only said that she didn't think she would ever get on with his family.

"I saw Semple to-day," he remarked, taking the cup she offered. "He spoke about that business."

"There you are!" she said. "You didn't refuse it, did you?" she asked quickly.

"No. But it's a deuce of a way. Means breaking a lot of ties."

"I think that's the best way," said Lena. "Ties have a way of tying you down."

"How about you?" he asked. "Would you care to go all that way?"

"We'd have each other," she muttered.

"Yes, by Jove, that's right enough, old girl."

She looked at him. He was showing the wear and tear of life under this new system of reaching for a livelihood instead of having it handed to him by respectful menials.

"I'm sure it would be better," she said. "You'll never do anything here, I know. Too much competition."

Leslie, after a gruelling day trying to see some of the tough characters who mysteriously get themselves into the illustrating departments of London journals, was inclined to agree with her. It was no joke to climb two or three flights of dusty stairs with a big brown paper parcel of sketches under his arm, only to find several other fellows there waiting for interviews. And possibly the great man, more like a prizefighter than an artist, would come out in his shirt sleeves with a cigar in his teeth, and look them over and say: "Well, you gentlemen better call

again. I'm busy this afternoon. No use waiting. We're booked up three months ahead now."

"Yes," he said, "it's pretty thick. I had an idea to-day, though. Look!" He took out his notebook and showed her a scheme for a series of postcards named after all the stations on the underground.

"See, dear. Here's 'Mansion House'—old boy going into his mansion. Three-colour work. Now here's 'Monument.' That'll be a gravestone, of course. Then there's 'Cannon Street' and 'Mark Lane,' easy ones. I think I'll try old Goldstein to-morrow and see what he says. If he takes it up, why there's no end of tin in it."

He was off again, and before he had finished his third cup of tea they were rolling in wealth and he was taking a house in the Boltons and having it done over. Lena watched his eyes sparkling, and his expressive hands gesticulating, with a sort of painful happiness. After all, though she would never have admitted it to his relatives, she was very proud of him. They were all in all to each other.

They went out to walk along toward Cremorne to see the sunset flaming beyond the bridges, and the great stacks of the new power station stood up like purple towers in a golden haze.

So their life went on, in hope and despondence, with Mr. Semple appearing at unexpected moments full of an unimaginable optimism; the shoulders of his coats more absurdly padded than ever, and en-

gagingly skilful at fabricating mysterious and pungent drinks that he called "restoratives" instead of "pick-me-ups." But every time he appeared he announced his mission more nearly completed, and he was all the more ready to sail back across the Atlantic to God's country. And the Lashmores would come in from a tour through the provinces, in town halls and " fit-ups," in some terrible melodrama like "East Lynne" or "A Girl's Crossroads," and drink up all the beer and explain how Martin Harvey had begged them to go with him to India and they had sternly refused because the parts given them were not fat enough. Or Miss Braybrooke would bring her "steady," who belied the title by getting tremendously drunk and managing to wake up in Vine Street Police Station full of alcoholic remorse. He got the sack from his job, of course; but he was a resilient creature, and when "bounced," as he called it, he rebounded with india-rubbery velocity to a higher position in another firm; and Miss Braybrooke, laughing in spite of herself, remarked that he needed to be locked up in order to realize his own value. He told Lena once he didn't believe in advertising, it was a waste of time and money.

"But how would you know what to buy?" she demanded; and he said all the instruments and means of production should be state-owned—no shops—only stores where everything was sold at cost. Look at the saving!

"How would the artists live?" asked Lena. "Or

the models," put in Miss Braybrooke. "Would you have state-owned models? Oh, go on with you!"

And the blushing communist hid his face in a beaker of ginger beer.

So their life went on, with journeys to St. John's Wood to keep important engagements that increased Lena's tiny bank account a few shillings, and delightful tours of the bric-à-brac shops that depleted the same bank account terribly. "Never mind," George Bayliss would say, "those things always sell for more than you gave for them. Always go up. Take them all with you when you go. Fetch a fortune in America, I dare say."

"Why not start a shop over there?" Leslie would say. "Must be no end of tin in it, or those Jews wouldn't be so keen on the business."

"A lot of chance we'd stand with Jews," Lena would retort, but the idea took her fancy all the same.

And then one night Hazel came without a word of warning, and stood in the doorway just beyond the rays of the lamp, all in black. Her face was white, and she seemed to be seven feet tall. Lena was alone, and looking up from the stocking she was mending, she gave a slight start at her sister's strange appearance. It struck her suddenly how little she knew of Hazel, in spite of the years they had slept near each other and listened to the sound of each other's voices. And she remembered, too, Hazel's bright abstracted gaze when she came to the

studio with their father, a gaze that had left a puzzled impression at the back of Lena's brain. She bent forward to look.

"Oh, Hazel, you frightened me at first. Why didn't you send a postcard to say you were coming?"

Hazel stepped into the room and looked round.

"I like this," she said, and sank into a chair. "I think I should like it. I didn't know I was coming, Lena. I only thought of it just now."

"You haven't run away?"

"I'm not sure, but I think I shall. Lena, I am so sick of Haythorne Terrace."

"Hazel, tell me what's happened. Has Mother——"

"Next week, Doctor Ffoulkes says. I wasn't thinking of that, though."

"Is Father all right?"

"Lena, I'll scream if you don't stop asking questions. Let me sit down and rest a little. I'm tired."

Lena looked at her sister again as she sank into a deep wicker chair in front of the fire. She was at a loss. What was Hazel doing in London between nine and ten at night?

"I intended to go to Fanny's, at first," said Hazel suddenly, "but I was so tired and this was close."

"Close to where?" asked Lena blankly. "What are you talking about?"

"Victoria Station. I've just come from there on the Ebury Street bus."

"I suppose I'm a bit dense," observed Lena, looking for another hole to darn, "but I haven't the faintest idea what you mean."

Hazel leaned toward the fire, pressed her hands to her eyes, and drew them slowly down her cheeks until they rested on her chin. Then, dropping them to her lap, she frowned.

"Lena, I came up in the Strikers' carriage from Barnet with Louis."

"You!" said Lena, and put down her work.

"Yes, we are engaged."

"I see. You didn't expect me to guess that, did you?" demanded Lena.

"I'm telling you now. Oh, Lena, it's been heavenly. And now it's over."

"What's over? Have you broken it off?"

"No. He's gone way to South America on business. He and Francis Striker are going to build a railway."

"Gone away and left you?"

"Oh, that was the arrangement. We've agreed to keep it secret. Mind you don't tell any one, especially at home, Lena. When he's settled he's —he's coming back for me, and we'll be married and go out there."

"How long will he be?"

"I don't know. A year, anyhow. It'll seem a long time," said Hazel slowly, staring at the fire.

"And you came up in the carriage all the way!"

"Yes. You see Louis had a telegram from

Francis, who is at Southampton, about some machinery they are taking out, that the boat sailed to-morrow morning instead of the evening as they thought. So as there weren't any trains, he had to borrow their carriage to catch the boat train at Victoria. He came round and told me at the shop. Oh, Lena, I couldn't help it. It was the last I shall see of him for I don't know how long. I was waiting under the trees when the carriage came out of the stable, and all the Strikers were at the door saying good-bye. He made the coachmen wait at the end of the lane there, you know, just by the church, and before any one could see I had jumped in and we were off."

Hazel lay back in her chair and looked at the fire. She had taken off her glasses and her face looked extraordinarily fragile and transparent, with an expression as of some tremendous experience yet reverberating in her heart.

"I never would have thought he meant to marry you," said Lena, bending over the darning again.

"What!" Hazel's thoughts must have been far away, for she started. "Oh! well, they're funny, men are," she remarked cryptically, and she continued looking at the fire.

"They'll think you've run away," said Lena, "or been run over," she added in her practical fashion. "You ought to go home, Hazel. What about the shop in the morning?"

"I'm going to leave the shop," said Hazel, "and I'm going to leave home. I couldn't stay there any more."

"But what will you do?" wondered Lena. "You can't stay here."

"Can't we have a place together?"

"Who's to pay the rent?" asked Lena. "I'm making about two pounds a week now. You won't expect me to do for you, will you?"

"No, I have had a letter from the publishers. They have offered me a hundred pounds for 'Crossing the Bar.'"

"A hundred pounds! You're dreaming."

"I've got the letter. It made me so glad this morning. Lena, I've never been drunk, but this evening I think I felt that way when Louis came into the shop and gave me a note asking me to come with him to London on a last ride together."

"A hundred pounds!" repeated Lena. It seemed like all the money in the world to her.

"Yes, don't harp on it," said Hazel with a touch of her old snappishness, yet absently, too, for she continued to stare into the fire as though living the evening over again. "And now I do believe I am on the road to fame. Just think, Lena, I shall be famous."

"And rich," said Lena.

"Perhaps," muttered Hazel.

"And happy. You'll have everything, Hazel."

"Everything, as you call it, has to be paid for,"

said Hazel, rousing up and putting her chin on her hand.

"Whatever do you mean?" asked Lena.

"I hardly know," said Hazel. "I suppose I ought to have gone home in the carriage, but I couldn't, I couldn't, after that—— Is that the time? And Mother——" she stopped. The thought of their mother brought these two young women to a standstill. They were discovering that they would have to depend on themselves. Miss Culvert and Mrs. Mills would look after Mother. And Mrs. Giffel was there, too, good old reliable Mrs. Giffel. Hazel's face softened as she remembered Mrs. Giffel's stentorian cheer when she came to the door in the middle of her chores and heard the great news about "Crossing the Bar." "We'll be seeing your picture in the magazines," she exclaimed, "at the age of one, then at four, then fourteen, then eighteen, and then present day! Well, I *am* delighted!" Mrs. Giffel really seemed to understand, and Hazel never dreamed that Mrs. Giffel had her own long thoughts, too, and was thinking of making a fresh start in a new and distant country. In Hazel's view there would have been something comical in an elderly widow having ambitions and actually trying to realize them.

"Kate says she thinks I am a pig to want to leave home," she remarked.

"It's all right for her. She's married," said Lena.

"That's what I told her. And she always was

stuck up about us. Lena, I want to come down here and live. They're such Philistines out at Barnet. I love the things you are getting here. That piano——"

"It's a spinet, and it's only a case; there's no strings or anything. I don't know what you mean by Philistines. I like pretty things because they are pretty."

"That's just what I mean," said Hazel.

"But I'd think you'd give up the idea of living on your own if you're going to be married in a year. I know I'd like to stick at home and make things for the bottom drawer."

"There's my writing, you see,"

"Well, yes—a hundred pounds is not to be sneezed at, indeed. Why, you can live in luxury for a year on that."

"I have an idea for another novel."

"Already?"

"Yes, it came as I was walking up from Ebury Street," said Hazel dreamily.

"What is it?" asked Lena, folding up her work and reaching for the copper kettle.

"A girl who gives everything to her sweetheart and waits while he goes away to the Colonies to make his fortune, and when he comes back he is poor but she has made her own fortune."

"Hazel, how can you? Why should she do that? Is it yourself you mean?"

"Not me. Another girl very like me. And do

you know why she does succeed? Because she finds if you give everything, you get something in return, and it's the most precious thing in the world."

"What is it?" said Lena. She turned away from the fire she had been stirring so that it blazed up and irradiated her face. Hazel leaned over and took the calm sweet face in her hands and shook her head.

"I'll never tell you that, Lena," she said. "You'll learn it perhaps. Perhaps not."

CONCLUSION

TWO men in caped ulsters were walking to and fro on the shining wet stones of the dock at Southampton. It was raining and late at night, and except for the uncertain glare of blue-white arc-lamps over the ship's hatches, it was dark. The two men were grotesquely disproportionate in their bulk, one being very large and the other broad but short. As they paused by the crane lifting a huge crate, and heard the deck-winch rattle loudly and send out a white billow of steam, the short man looked at a piece of paper he had under his cape and remarked:

"That's the last one, Striker. They're all on board for you now. Seven hundred and fourteen tons."

Francis Striker did not reply. It was his habit to refrain from needless speech, and Mr. Rouken, his companion, understood the silence and led the way toward the gangway. The winches continued to roar and rattle, the stevedore's whistle shrilled, but it was for cargo in which these two men had no interest and they sought the purser to check up their consignments.

It was characteristic of them, moreover, that they

should stand in a chilling drizzle late at night and satisfy themselves that everything they had ordered was put on board. They had decided that, with the concession in their hands and a favourable report from San Benito, it would be better to wait for the whole of the modern plant they proposed to send out for the building of a dock. It was here now, and as they turned into the stateroom Francis and Louis were to share as far as the Isthmus, they experienced a feeling of relief.

"I dare say you know well enough we're casting our bread upon the waters," said Mr. Rouken, turning to the basin to wash his hands of the dock dirt.

"Yes, I understand that," said the big young man, yawning. "By Jove, I'm tired! I suppose Louis will be here in time. I wired him we sailed at ten o'clock."

"Noon, I thought," said Mr. Rouken.

"Noon it is, and the Chief Officer says it may be one, but I told Louis ten, to get him here." Mr. Rouken nodded comprehendingly.

"Suppose he doesn't arrive?"

Francis made a gesture.

"That's his lookout."

"You think he'll stand the gaff?"

"Oh, yes." Francis conveyed in his tone that Louis had reserves of which Mr. Rouken knew nothing.

"You see, he has a girl," Francis muttered.

Mr. Rouken smiled as he stood squarely in front of the young man and wiped his hands on a small white towel. "No harm in that," he commented blithely. "You'll be having one yourself one of these fine days!"

"Of course. Plenty of time for that."

He stood up, very tall and massive, a glow of almost rustic health on his unshaved cheeks, yet with a dusky ring under the eyes that came from weariness and gave him an air of monastic chastity. That, indeed, was his preponderant trait. Nor did it occur to him to censure the occasion that made it necessary for him to stand over those consignments all day and half the night to make sure. It was the obsession of his life—making sure. It was the principle behind his ambition, the inspiration of his austere creed and of his preparation for a distant destiny. He might, had his lines been cast in another day or class, have achieved fame in the services in which men work, not for their own aggrandizement, but for the glory of their race and nation. With him the flair was for individual accomplishment expressed in dominion over men and natural forces. The indolence of the fanciful, of the artistic, was not in him. Instinctively he saw behind the low foothills of immediate toil to the far peaks of power. His character was visible in his pose, in the maturing features beneath the sodden deerstalker, in the large, beautifully modelled hands and the indomitable slope of the neck. The light blond moustache later

became the prematurely gray toothbrush above an iron mouth. Yet even then he preserved the look of being beyond the decoys of the flesh.

"A good wife," observed Mr. Rouken, taking out a cigar and cutting the end off, "is the making of a man sometimes."

Francis agreed in this, but did not say so. He thought of Louis as one of those men to whom "a good wife" would be an advantage. He suspected the main difference between Louis and himself was that in his friend's mind was no vision of greatness in achievement, but rather of a castle of indolence wherein were many bright female presences, chambered in languorous emotions. It was not in Francis to see how those same women, who would always follow each other in his friend's life, might spur him to a greater effort and afford him an otherwise unimagined aspiration. That side of Francis was illuminated by the strong steady love he had always borne to the boy, with whom he had tramped the dusty roads of Normandy and shared the high dim-lighted bedroom in the house in the Rue National in Rouen. The analysis of life and the unravelling of emotions were no part of this young man's scheme. He had no talent for the obscure. But when he stood up and looked at his partner, he conveyed to that shrewd and competent person an impression of fidelity and strength.

Suddenly he made a confession as he took off his ulster. He looked round at the narrow space of the

stateroom, the ultimate reduction of accommodation for human beings, and remarked:

"Smelly places, ships. Do you know, I once ran away to sea?"

"No!" said Mr. Rouken, who was waiting to go up to the public room.

"Yes, I didn't get far, though. Pater came tooling down to the ship in a fourwheeler and I had to go home."

Upstairs in the smokeroom, where a sleepy steward stared out at the cargo men in the rain, Rouken said:

"Why don't you come to the hotel for to-night? You'll have all you want of this between here and Colon."

"No, thanks. I'll stay here now," said Francis. "If Louis comes during the night, as he very likely will, I'll be here to meet him."

"Then if there's nothing more I can do," said Mr. Rouken, "I'll say good-bye. I must get the early train back to town in the morning."

"Nothing. I'll write you when the stuff is landed. You'll want to know that, of course. And I'll send you a report every month as I promised. I can't do any more now."

"No. Good-bye and good luck."

They shook hands. And then, after the manner of men of their race, each went his way and they never met again in the flesh.

Francis, who judged Louis to be travelling that night since he had sent no message, studied the time-

table and decided to go later to the station. Now that the business was over and done with, and nothing remained but an effortless journey across the sea, Francis discovered he needed a companion. He was one of those who, being without illusions themselves, discover a sudden need for vicarious nourishment. Unconsciously they feed on their friends, which may pass as an illusion, after all. And Francis could give strength in return for this charm of personality that was Louis, the gay detached savourer of life, with his quick intellectual grasp of book-learning and his boyish indolence before the real problems of commerce and diplomacy. Yet he would never get anywhere without a master, a mind and character capable of seizing upon those opportunities and conditions that alone render possible the grand successes.

It did not occur to Francis Striker, as he walked through the darkness and rain to the station some hours later, that the whole of the magnificent edifice which he was building, an edifice spread far over an alien tropical land, was lodged within his own brain. He did not reflect with complacency that, without him, there was neither stability nor form. Even when these grandiose schemes became visible after herculean effort, after floods and earthquakes and disease had swept his armies to their deaths, after bankruptcy and sullen despair, Francis never dwelt upon the romantic nature of origins. Those alluring and irrelevant conceptions were the prerogative of poets and artists. He walked into the desolate

terminus by the docks with a mind at ease save as to the arrival of his friend. And when Louis suddenly appeared among the crowd of travellers bound for the Channel steamer, Francis was relieved.

"Glad you managed it, old fellow," he said. "All serene. Rouken's gone to his hotel to sleep. We've got everything stowed away. Thought I'd wait up and meet you."

"Well, here I am. I had to ask your people to lend me the carriage to come up to town. There was no train, you know, to connect with this one."

Francis took his friend's arm and piloted him toward the ship. Louis stopped as they went up the gangway and looked back.

"We are really going," he muttered, and gave a nervous laugh.

"Sorry?" asked Francis, close behind him.

"No, not sorry, but it will be a wrench, I think." He went on up and stepped upon the deck. "I'm not sure, if I'd known what it would be, that I'd have come."

"Too late now, old fellow."

"Yes, too late!" replied Louis with unexpected alacrity, and he stood waiting while Francis called a steward and told him to attend to the baggage.

It was when they were in their stateroom and about to climb into their unaccustomed bed places, one above the other, that Louis, tired in body and spirit, craved the relief of sharing the secrets of his heart. He sat on the little camp stool, smoking a cigarette,

while Francis, stretched out in the lower bunk, with closed eyes and his huge arms folded, listened without uttering a word. He was in shadow, too, and Louis appeared to be talking moodily to himself.

"So you see," he was saying after what seemed to him a long while, "I must come back before very long."

"You can't come back," said Francis suddenly, and fell silent again.

"But I must," said Louis. "Do you think I could stay out there and leave Hazel——"

"You can't come back, perhaps for years," said the voice again. "Everything we have is in this business. We've got to stick it, at all costs."

Louis did not reply for a moment. He fancied Francis was thinking of that long ride in the darkness along the silent roads into London, the exquisite communion of two young reckless and inexperienced hearts. But Francis was not thinking of that. He was aware of what Louis had told him, not as a divine episode but as a disagreeable fact tending to dislocate the future. He knew his own technical deficiencies, and Louis was destined, in his mind, to compensate for them.

"You should have avoided that sort of thing," he muttered from the shadow. "Not that I wish to preach, old man. But better not go at all than turn tail in a few months and leave me, you understand."

That was his attitude from the beginning—an intolerance of sentiment and emotion of every kind when they collided with the grand design. He was

capable of a certain humility before great passions he did not understand, if they described their orbits beyond the scene of his activities. But nearer, they encountered a cool surface of adamant, a hostility that eventually communicated itself to the organizations he founded and was the source of that relentless driving spirit distinguishing them from the native enterprises about them.

And this was implicit in his demeanour next evening as the steamer went out past the Start and the lights of England died behind them. For he did not see those lights. He was leaning on the forward rail of the bridge deck and looking into the advancing darkness. He was experiencing an unwonted uplifting of his spirit as the sharp sting of the freshening wind smote his face and he felt beneath him the faint rhythmic pulsations of the machinery. Sometime in the dim future he was to return bearing quietly in his hands the wealth and power of more than one European monarch. He was to find waiting for him the open coffers of great banking houses and the respect and hospitality of rulers. He was to have at his command the resources of empires, and his name, because of his character, was to have the authority of kings and princes. He was to be envied for his luck and his fortune, and traduced for his ruthless disregard of the weakling, the communist, and the remittance man. He was to found universities and experience the imprecations of those who fed from his hand. He was to succour the widow

and the fatherless and shelter the aged, and they were to vilify him as a monster with a heart of stone.

So he looked into the Channel darkness as the ship bore him toward the scene of his extraordinary achievements. And behind him, looking toward the land of his adoption, on whose bosom he had dreamed the dreams of poetry and youth, was the friend upon whom he depended and whose memory he kept alive in his heart to the end. For it was characteristic that while Francis stared into the distance ahead, Louis should look back to see the last of the shores he would never behold again. And his was to be a different destiny. He was to know the pangs of parting and remorse, the strength and weakness of the flesh. He was to behold the shining plangent splendours of a tropical tongue, and express therein with naïve genius the mingled strains of a tortured spirit. He was to love and be loved, and he was to return from the byways of sensuous dalliance to the welcoming arms of an undying affection. He was to see his offspring and hear with inexpressible happiness the cries of an infant son.

And then, when the last gleam was gone from the dark horizon, he went forward to join his friend, and for a while they stood with the keen wind on their faces, looking toward their destinies, which were a mingling of bloods, and the fermenting of sweet thoughts into strong desires, and the beginning of new races.

THE END

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